

## **DOCTORAL THESIS**

### **Moving Identities**

### **Multiplicity, Embodiment and the Contemporary Dancer**

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## ***Chapter 1***

### ***From Dancing Bodies to Corporeal Configurations***

#### **1.1 A Broad Vista of Practice**

What are we seeing when we watch the dancer dance? Is it the accurate unfolding of the choreographer's oeuvre or is it the dancer's *interpretation* of the idea? From where does the movement form emerge, the choreographer's body or the dancer's body or both? What gives the movement its specific identity? What brings about the differences that we see between one dancer and the next?

When describing the dancer in abstraction, a moving body encapsulating a high level of technical virtuosity, discipline and control, a body shaped through strict training ideologies, displaying versatility and competence is normally imagined. Thus, the dancer can appear to be an 'other' being displaying a super-human physicality. However, the role of dancer is currently embodied in many different ways within the broad vista of professional contemporary dance practice. For example, there are many obvious differences between the high octane virtuosic athleticism, involving dancers tumbling and contorting in a myriad of forms and configurations, of Belgian choreographer Alan Platel's VSPRS (2006) for Ballet C de la B, and the movement minimalism of Jérôme Bel's piece entitled Jérôme Bel (1995). The latter involves the most subtle and basic explorations of the body and relative to Platel's piece, employs very little movement at all.

Each of these dance pieces was performed within the context of The International Dance Festival Ireland<sup>1</sup> (VSPRS in 2006 and Jérôme Bel in 2002) which takes place in Dublin, Ireland, where this research is also based. Although Platel's work is unconventional in approach, with much of the choreography appearing as a chaotic and random expression of the dancers' momentary impulses, its relentless movement easily

<sup>1</sup> The festival was re-named the Dublin Dance Festival in 2008.

places it in a dance context. However, Bel's minimalist piece provoked an audience member to sue the International Dance Festival on a charge of false advertising because, he stated, "there was nothing in the performance [he] would describe as dance" (Holland in Lepecki, 2006: 2). I use these two examples because the activity of the dancer as performer is highly contrasting in each work, yet both are classified within the contemporary dance genre.

In this current historical moment the role of dancer is embodied in many different ways. The sheer variety of activities that are encapsulated by the term 'dancer' in the twenty-first century are evident in the above examples of Platel and Bel and even more palpable when one considers that a contemporary dancer could conceivably work with both of these choreographers during her/his career. For example, over the period from 2002 to 2006, as an independent contemporary dancer, I worked with choreographers John Jasperse (US), Christina Gaigg (Austria), Liz Roche (Ireland), Jodi Melnick (US) and Rosemary Butcher (UK). Each choreographer had a personal working methodology and a specific creative objective that shaped the choreographic movement for the piece. Each of these ways of moving would appear distinct from the others and required a different approach by the dancer.

Depending on the choreographic process they engage in, dancers could be considered to be choreographic 'instruments' or the choreographer's 'canvas', or artistic collaborators who are the substance of the process itself (see Boris Charmatz, 2.9). Exploration of the dancer's position within critical discourse reveals that the role is often perceived as passive within the dance-making process. Dance writer André Lepecki (2006:54), articulates an extreme view of this, stating that the dancer is, "nothing more than a faithful executor of the designs of the absent, remote, perhaps dead, yet haunting power of the master's will".

The entrance of dance into academia, together with demands from the globalised performing arts marketplace, creates the conditions for categorising dance-making into styles and genres. In academia, categorisation allows scholars to analyse and discuss choreographic trends and in the marketplace, it allows dance programmers and artists to promote and sell dance works. This way of viewing choreography leads to the promotion of the choreographer as signature artist and therefore elides the significance of dancers in the creation process through objectifying them. Ramsay Burt (2004: 30) expresses the dancer's exclusion or even disappearance from dance discourse:

Too often dance analysis means the analysis of a disembodied ideal essence conventionally called 'choreography'—rather than an analysis of the performance of that choreography by sometimes troubling and disturbingly material dancing bodies.

Indeed, the subjective experience of dancers as they engage with the choreographic process is rarely expressed within current dance discourse. Generally, the choreography 'in abstraction' is prioritised as the site of meaning above the materiality of the dancer who embodies and materialises the work. Therefore, choreographic works possess an aura of engaging with dance history and the formation of a dance legacy which contemporary dancers and their singular interpretations seldom do. For example, Alexandra Carter (1998:53) commented, when compiling The Routledge Dance Studies Reader, "the difficulty was in finding writing by dancers at all, especially on their experiences of performance".

To examine the cause of the dancer's exclusion from the discursive arena of dance it is necessary to acknowledge the hierarchy of tangible, knowable archival 'facts' (or that which remains) over the more elusive, 'enfleshed' knowing of the repertoire (or that which remains through enactment). According to Diana Taylor (2003:19) the need to categorise dance-making, performing and the growing body of dance discourse within academia has fore-grounded a very fundamental inherent problem in dance and its

relationship to archival knowledge which is, “archival memory succeeds in separating the source of “knowledge’ from the knower—in time and/or space”. Taylor (2003:20) elaborates:

The repertoire requires presence: people participate in the production and reproduction of knowledge by ‘being there’, being part of the transmission.

Dance as an art form suffers due to its ephemeral nature; it does not leave a written document behind, but can only enter a public archive through video documentation or, in some cases, dance notation. This has a political consequence, according to Taylor (2003:25):

The dominance of language and writing has come to stand for *meaning itself*. Live, embodied practices not based in linguistic or literary codes, we must assume, have no claims on meaning.

Dancers embody a living repertoire of movement but the archive, as text, video or photograph, exists independently of their bodies and is shaped by, and connects with, other signifying forces. The dancer is no longer called upon to represent the dance piece once it enters the archive. This renders the dancer’s experiential knowledge of the work as inconsequential in comparison to the more important artistic or political statement proposed by the choreographer through the choreography.

The primacy of the choreographer within dance practice is a relatively recent phenomenon. In the early twentieth century, according to Lynn Garafola (1989: 195), the choreographer was little more than a ballet master attached to an opera house, who “performed a host of other functions as well—dancing, teaching, coaching, rehearsing and administration”. Dancers such as Tamara Karsavina (1885-1978), Vaslav Nijinsky (1889-1950) and Anna Pavlova (1881-1931) had enormous fame and box office power. Garafola (1989:196) situates the development of the choreographer as an artist within Diaghilev’s Ballet Russes (1909-1929) where Mikhail Fokine (1880-1942) emerged as a freelance

choreographer in his own right, “on a par with the independent painter, poet, singer or composer” (subsequently, other Diaghilev choreographers followed suit). This development also led to choreographic works becoming commodities that could be acquired and re-staged.

In the development of modern dance, the ‘dancer-choreographer’ role was prevalent (see 2.6). Artists such as Martha Graham (1894-1991), Doris Humphrey (1895-1958) and Erick Hawkins (1909-1994) formed dance companies through which they performed their choreographies, often creating a movement technique that supported their creative work. Many of these movement techniques have maintained relevance within dance training systems and carry the name of the choreographer who originated them.

The role of the freelance contemporary choreographer has emerged as significant within current contemporary dance practice. This type of choreographer may or may not be associated with a company and often creates work on a project—by—project basis. Projects can often be instigated through commissions from companies, performance venues or festivals as well as through funding from public bodies<sup>2</sup>. Choreographers working outside a company system may develop stable working relationships with specific dancers for a number of years. However, it is often necessary for independent dancers to seek employment on a number of different projects with different choreographers throughout any given year. The choreographer will employ dancers for distinct projects that are generally six to eight weeks long and therefore dancers may work with many different choreographers, often simultaneously, throughout

<sup>2</sup> Freelance British-based choreographer, Kim Brandstrup in Brandstrup, Susan Melrose and Steffi Sachsenmaier (2005-2006 [online]:1), stated in a recent interview that he “often start[s] to make new work on the basis of a commission”.

their career. The dancer's journey through these various encounters with different movement approaches forms the basis of this research.

In this chapter, I trace the genealogy of the independent contemporary dancer to identify the specific circumstances that this creative role entails. I begin by exploring a text entitled *Dancing Bodies* by Susan Leigh Foster (1992). Although this cannot cover current trends in independent dance that have developed since 1992, Foster's mapping of different kinds of 'dancing bodies' is useful as a means of uncovering how the creative practice of the contemporary dancer developed from earlier approaches. Foster's descriptions remain relevant to current and future developments in dance because many of the techniques she describes are still used today within the dance profession. Even more significantly, many of these techniques are utilised within the majority of training systems for contemporary dancers.

## 1.2 Dancing Bodies: The Dancer's Formation

Foster (1992) discusses the *cultivation* of the dancing body through focusing on a number of choreographer-led dance styles, which emerged in North America throughout the twentieth century. These styles were formed in opposition to classical ballet and are categorised under the term 'modern dance', a genre that also emerged in Germany through artists such as Rudolf Laban (1879-1958) and Mary Wigman (1886-1973). Foster (1992:480) traces the development of these styles into focused training techniques that trained dancers to perform the work of the associated choreographer, thus she states, "I know the body only through its response to the methods and techniques used to cultivate it".

Foster describes the individual aesthetic and ideas behind each system and indicates how each technique produces a particular kind of dancing body. By outlining the different aesthetic endeavour of each technique, she shows that dance styles have

cultural values embedded within them. Foster does this through identifying the various types of 'ideal bodies' that underscore each training process. She states, "training [*thus*] creates two bodies: one perceived and tangible; the other aesthetically ideal" (Foster, 1992: 482). For example, in Graham technique,

The ideal body, [*then*], even as it manifests an agile responsiveness, also shows in the strained quality and definition of its musculature the ordeal of expression.

Foster, 1992:486

This is in contrast to classical ballet wherein the ideal body performs complex phrases "with lyrical effortlessness", and also different to (Isadora) Duncan technique which projects "simplicity in its movement and harmony with the self" (Foster, 1992:486).

Therefore, it is the very system that the body practices that forms it. The ballet student becomes 'balletic' and the Graham technique student becomes 'Graham-like'. Foster (1992:482) describes how modern dance styles such as Graham, Duncan, and Cunningham emerged out of a specific moment in history, which shaped the aesthetic goal of each technique. Therefore, she posits, "the daily practical participation of a body in any of these disciplines makes of it a body—of—ideas". She is describing the dancer's body as a 'site for inscription' that is constructed through the effects of political and social discourses. This follows from Michel Foucault (1977:148), who stated, "the body is the inscribed surface of events (traced by language and dissolved by ideas)".

### 1.3 Embodying the Ideal

Foster's text reveals that the dancer is trained through a relationship with a projected 'ideal' body. The effect of this was described by one of the professional dancers, who participated in a workshop that I held as part of this research, in Dublin on 9<sup>th</sup> August 2005. She/he wrote about the frustration of marrying the 'mental imaging' with the material body which is subject to different rules of operation:



The internal experience of dancing, the mental imaging, and the observation of it are like three different bodies. The mental imaging—the dancing in my head—is weightless, free from obstacles such as gravity or anatomy, free from the body itself. So there is an inherent contradiction or aggravation in realising our mental dance realm with a body operating under different rules to our imagination.

Research Participant, 9/08/05<sup>3</sup>

Thus, dance training entails a relationship to ‘otherness’ that could be considered in the extreme, to reflect the colonizing process. From outside the dance field, Fernando and Alfonso de Toro (1995: iv) write of the similarities of purpose and operation of modernism and colonialism, stating that “their perennial thrust is systemically outward, their justification endemically exclusionary and esoteric”.<sup>4</sup> Although the connection I propose between dance training and colonizing processes may seem tenuous, it is intended to reflect the way in which institutional training, that employs industrialised processes to train dancers, can wipe out the individual dancer’s body expressivity. This issue is explored in chapter 2 in more detail through exploring ‘artisanal’ approaches to dance training (see 2.3 and 2.6).

The process of operating under the principles of a dance technique, that maintains its position as an unachievable ‘ideal’, may create feelings of inadequacy and low self-worth that are similar to post-colonial residue. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (1989:9) identify the key issues for the colonized, which are the inability to verbalise the post-colonial experience through the tongue of the colonizer, a conflicted

<sup>3</sup> A list of research participants is included in Appendix C.

<sup>4</sup> The relationship between modernism and colonialism seems to have resonance for dance training in particular. The modern dance techniques that are mentioned above have been brought into industrialised training systems within institutional structures that often are modelled on the ballet academy. Indeed, the ‘one-size fits all’ institutional training programmes run counter to the origins of modern dance which arose in opposition to the uniformity of ballet (see 2.6).

relationship between “self and place” and a “crisis in self-image”. This has implications for the dancer when negotiating issues of identity, which I explore in later chapters (see Ríonach Ní Néill, 1.17).

Dance scholar Geraldine Morris (2003:21) has examined training in classical ballet, noting that ballet dancers become unconsciously inculcated into the specific culture of ballet and this “affects their movement and thought processes”. She states that they are “balletically constructed individuals”. Dance writer Ann Cooper Albright (1997: 54) also identifies “the cultural ideologies that are literally incorporated into contemporary dance” and more profoundly, she highlights “the meanings sewn into the neuromusculature of the body”. This indicates the deep impact of practices incorporated within human subjects and the way in which dancers are formed as individuals through the training systems with which they engage. Foster (1992:493) further states that these techniques mark the body “so deeply that a dancer could not adequately perform another technique”.

It appears that the dance techniques that Foster describes above imprint heavily on the body by operating as inculcating practices. However, it must not be assumed that dance techniques represent closed systems. Paradoxically, as techniques are utilised to clarify and codify movement, they are also subjected to change and modification through various (re)incorporations. For example, classical ballet has changed significantly from the beginning of the twentieth century to the current day. Furthermore, dancers do not ‘perform’ technique, but rather choreography, which even within clearly defined styles is open to adaptation across dance pieces. Dance critic, Jean Marc-Adolphe (2002:301), explains:

When she was asked at the end of her life about the proliferation of techniques that carried her name, Martha Graham claimed to have never developed a rigidly set technique and to still be at a stage of research.

Evidently, Martha Graham did not see her own technique as a closed and rigid system. Nevertheless, modern dance techniques have become uprooted from their origins as choreographic styles in order to reside within institutional dance training systems.

Primarily, Foster's text is useful as a way of establishing the impact of a movement practice on a dancer's way of moving. Feminist writer Elizabeth Grosz (1994) also affirms that movement patterns 'mark' the body. Grosz (1994) re-iterates Foucault's notion of the body as an inscribed surface and thus re-iterates the impossibility of a pre-cultural, a-historical body. She states,

The naked...body is [*still*] marked by its disciplinary history, by its habitual patterns of movement, by the corporeal commitments it has undertaken in day-to-day life.

Grosz, 1994:142

In the understanding that dance techniques shape the dancing body, how does Foster's model of inscription work when applied to the independent contemporary dancer, who incorporates and embodies many different movement techniques and not only one?

#### 1.4 The 'Hired Body'—Developments in the US

In broaching the issue of the independent contemporary dancer, Foster (1992:494) goes on to identify a new kind of dancer whom she names the "hired body", and she locates this phenomenon as originating from the experiments of the Judson Dance Theatre in the 1960s and 1970s in New York. Foster (1992:493) states that "a new cadre of "independent choreographers, [has] emerged" following this period of artistic exploration and that, rather than developing individual dance techniques to sustain their choreographic work, they "encourage dancers to train in several existing techniques, without adopting the aesthetic vision of any". This locates Foster's text in a specific era at a point in time when the independent dancer was beginning to be noticed by dance studies. However, it also marks the beginning of a 'blind spot' in mapping the creative

process of the independent dancer. To my knowledge, dancers are generally only discussed in dance studies in relation to the choreographers with whom they work, if at all.

The Judson Dance Theatre challenged the apparently hierarchal system of choreographer-led companies and dance techniques that emerged through modern dance. Sally Banes (1993:10), writing about the Judson era, explains how one of the significant dance artists of the time, Steve Paxton (1939—) believed that “the history of modern dance had been tainted by cults of personality, and he searched for ways of stripping any trace of the artist’s hand from his own work”. Interestingly, the technique that Steve Paxton is credited with originating, ‘contact improvisation’, does not carry his name, but exists as a legacy of the democratic positioning of movement authorship within a strand of dance performance that was encouraged through the Judson project.

At the White Space Conference at the University of Limerick in 2000, Paxton was asked about an issue in relation to his work as a postmodern dancer/choreographer. He corrected the interviewer by saying that rather than being postmodern, he thought of himself as ‘post-Cunningham’. Paxton’s positioning of Merce Cunningham (1919- 2009) attests to the latter’s influence on the Judson artists and contemporary dance practice in general<sup>5</sup>. Therefore Cunningham’s approach bears some description here, however brief. He was indeed seminal in his influence on dance worldwide, through challenging many of the embedded conventions within modern dance and proposing innovative methods of constructing choreography. His work is non-representational and often explores patterning through the use of mathematical structures and chance decision-making.

<sup>5</sup> It also perhaps suggests that Paxton was not happy with the term postmodern to describe his work.

Cunningham presented the dance, music, set and lighting as distinct elements that co-existed (at times randomly) within the performance space. In an earlier text, Foster (1986: 169) explains:

Once the dance and by extension, the body, was disengaged [by Cunningham] from the structure of the musical accompaniment and freed from service to the expressive subject, it acquired a variety of choreographic options.

By using chance structures such as the *I Ching*<sup>6</sup>, Cunningham also subverted his own hierarchical position as author of the work (Foster, 1986)<sup>7</sup>. Through his choreographic work, Cunningham developed a movement technique that entered the modern dance canon and is still widely used as a training system for dancers.

Following on from Cunningham, the 'choreographic options' that expanded upon the experimentation of choreographers of the Judson era, 'unhooked' the dancing body from canonical dance vocabularies (including Cunningham technique), representation and expressionism, to present "the body as a thing that senses, moves and responds" (Cooper Albright, 1997: 20). Sally Banes (1977:44) writes:

The possibility is proposed that dance is neither the perfection of technique nor of expression, but quite something else—the presentation of objects in themselves.

### 1.5 The Emergence of the Independent Contemporary Dancer

Experiments in dance in the 1960s in North America influenced many dance trends worldwide. For this research, I worked with dancers and choreographers from Britain and Ireland as well as the US<sup>8</sup>. Having briefly introduced the origins of independent dance in

<sup>6</sup> The *I Ching*, or Book of Changes, is an ancient Chinese system of divination, which involves throwing three coins, the numerical sum of which corresponds to a hexagram. Each hexagram advises on a specific course of action.

<sup>7</sup> This shift can be traced to Roland Barthes's (1977) concept of the 'death of the author' (see 2.9).

<sup>8</sup> I have interviewed dancer Rebecca Hilton from Australia also. However the majority of choreographers and dancers involved in this research were located in Ireland, the UK and the US. Therefore, I have focused on the emergence of the independent dancer in these countries.

the US in the previous section, I now outline some of the parallel developments that led to the emergence of the independent contemporary dancer in Ireland and the UK.

### 1.5.1 Ireland

In Ireland, the development of dance has had a truncated history. In 1927, Irish-born Dame Ninette De Valois (founder of the British Royal Ballet) started the Abbey School of Ballet with Irish poet and playwright William Butler Yeats (1865-1939). Their collaboration took place throughout a number of productions, in which Yeats utilised dance to represent 'the metaphysical' in his work (Noreen Doody in Mulrooney, Deirdre 2006). De Valois's relationship to the Abbey School of Ballet diminished as her responsibilities grew in London with the Royal Ballet but, according to Victoria O'Brien (2006), the school continued to influence dance in Ireland through a number of incarnations until 1941.

In the 1940s, a German-born student of Mary Wigman with Irish heritage, Erina Brady, escaped Nazi Germany for Ireland. She trained a generation of dancers such as Jacqueline Robinson<sup>9</sup> and June Fryer<sup>10</sup>, yet until recently, there was very little known about this period of dance development in Ireland. According to Deirdre Mulrooney (2006: 86), Brady left Ireland in 1951 because,

Despite her Herculean efforts, in an atmosphere where anything vaguely bodily was taboo, Brady's modern dance movement could not thrive.

This passage reflects the control of bodily expression exerted by both the Catholic Church and the nationalist government of the time. From the 1920s, there was evidence of on-going state and church hostility to any kind of 'foreign', that is, 'non-traditional' dance

<sup>9</sup> Robinson founded l'Atelier de la Danse in Paris and became an important figure in the development of modern dance in France (Mulrooney, 2006: 85).

<sup>10</sup> Fryer danced in productions at the Peacock Theatre and the Mansion House in Dublin and also taught dance in schools. She married Walter Kuhn, who was a dancer in Kurt Jooss's ballet, The Green Table, which was performed at the Gaiety theatre in Dublin in 1953.

(Barbara O'Connor, 2006: 40). Catherine Nash (1997:115) writes that censorship of foreign cultural influences was practiced by the Irish state in order to protect the core values of the emerging Irish national identity<sup>11</sup>. This was specifically aimed at *protecting* women who embodied the “cultural purity of the nation”, from foreign corruption through:

Foreign fashions, film, literature, music and dance and foreign notions of sexual equality, [which] it was said, undermined the home and native honour towards women and degraded Irish women.

Nash, 1997: 115

In the 1970s, within an Irish society that was beginning to open to foreign influences, Irish choreographer and dancer Joan Davis began training with American dancer Terez Nelson. Davis is widely recognised in Ireland as being a pioneer of contemporary dance. Nelson taught Graham technique in Dublin and Davis also travelled to London to take classes at the London School of Contemporary Dance (Mulrooney, 2006: 117). Davis founded Dublin Contemporary Dance Theatre (DCDT) in 1979 and some of the original dancers of the company went on to form their own dance companies which are still operating today; for example, Mary Nunan (Daghdha Dance Company) and Robert Connor and Loretta Yurrick (Dance Theatre of Ireland).

By 1985 there were three main dance companies in Ireland in receipt of Arts Council funding. They were Irish National Ballet (INB) (founded in 1973) and based in Cork, Dublin City Ballet (DCB) (founded in 1980)<sup>12</sup> and DCDT. Both DCB and DCDT were based in the capital. Both ballet companies incorporated contemporary work into their

<sup>11</sup> The “political and economic subordination” of women was ratified in the 1937 Constitution—which defined their role as “maternal and femininity as essentially passive, private and domestic” (Nash, 1997:115).

<sup>12</sup> DCB was originally Dublin Metropolitan Ballet (founded in 1979).

repertoire, particularly Dublin City Ballet, which staged three works by post-Graham North American choreographer Anna Sokolow<sup>13</sup>. As a young dancer, I worked with Dublin City Ballet and, following on from my professional training in London at Central School of Ballet from 1988-1991, I have been a member of the Irish dance community<sup>14</sup>.

Dublin Contemporary Dance Theatre's repertoire was influenced in the main by postmodern work from the US, including the work of Art Bridgman and Myrna Packer; Sara and Jerry Pearson and Yoshiko Chuma, all New York-based artists, using different approaches that ranged from the Judson era, contact improvisation and the modern dance technique of Alwin Nikolais<sup>15</sup>.

In 1989, after an extensive report commissioned by the Arts Council from writer and dance consultant, Peter Brinson<sup>16</sup>, into the sustainability of funding for dance in Ireland, all funding to professional theatre dance was cut.<sup>17</sup> This cessation in funding destabilised the art form considerably and placed considerable pressure on dance artists

<sup>13</sup> Sokolow, who was born 1910 in New York, was the daughter of Russian immigrants. She danced with Martha Graham from 1925- 1928 and began choreographing during that period. According to Jean Morrison Brown, Naomi Mindlin and Charles H. Woodford (1979: 107), "throughout her choreographic career, Sokolow's dances have been based on passionate social comment".

<sup>14</sup> I have been the dance adviser to the Arts Council of Ireland since 2007, which has given me an overview of the developments in dance in Ireland in recent years.

<sup>15</sup> Nikolais (1910- 1993) was born in Southington, Connecticut, of Russian and German ancestry. He studied with Truda Kaschmann, a former student of Wigman and Hanya Holm. "His dances used mixed media before the term was invented". Creating an effect that could be described as "kinetic art" (Morrison Brown et al 1979: 113).

<sup>16</sup> Brinson was the head of Research and Community Development at the Laban Centre in London at that time.

<sup>17</sup> It was not in fact Brinson's initial recommendation that all dance funding in Ireland should be cut. He submitted his recommendations to restructure the Irish dance scene in 1985, but in 1989, after attempts to implement some of his suggestions, the Arts Council terminated all professional dance funding. Interestingly, when interviewed by the Irish Times about the extreme measures of the Arts Council at this time, Brinson stated "I make four comments, particularly in light of my Report of May 1985 on the development of theatrical dance in Ireland. First, this was a courageous decision with which I agree. Second, we would have made a similar root and branch recommendation in my Report had it been politically possible at the time. Third, it is interesting that a similarly rigorous reappraisal of dance performance standards is taking place in England, with similarly painful conclusions. Fourth, we must wait to judge the Arts Council's plans for public and professional dance education once these are announced as a long term strategy to raise dance standards generally in Ireland" (Anon, Dance News Ireland, 1989).



working from the early 1990s onwards, not only to find distinctive choreographic voices, but at the same time to attempt to create a cohesive and unified artistic community.

Although Arts Council funding for dance since the 1990s has greatly increased and contemporary dance has a much higher profile in Ireland nationally, with a number of successful choreographer-led companies operating, there are as yet no professional-level vocational dance training courses in Ireland. This means that Irish contemporary dancers generally seek training abroad, mainly in Britain but also in Europe and the US, which has the serious effect of diminishing the number of dancers who return to Ireland to work professionally.

The establishment of Dance House in Dublin in 2007, managed by the all-Ireland resource organisation, Dance Ireland, has strengthened the dance scene in Ireland. A number of independent dance artists operate out of Dublin and most of the established Irish companies engage in international touring with support from the government agency Culture Ireland. The Dublin Dance Festival<sup>18</sup> (established in 2002) annually programmes international dance work, which also influences the choreographic trends coming out of Ireland. Increased economic security in Ireland in the period from 1997 onwards has opened the possibility for travel and exchange, leading to commissions by Irish companies from choreographers such as Rosemary Butcher (UK), Thomas Lehman (Germany), Sara Rudner (US), Steve Paxton (US) and Rui Horta (Portugal). In recent years, the approach of Judson choreographer Deborah Hay has influenced a number of independent artists through the Genesis Project<sup>19</sup>.

<sup>18</sup> As mentioned earlier, this was previously the International Dance Festival Ireland.

<sup>19</sup> The Genesis Project is an artist-led peer-mentoring project founded by Ella Clarke and Julie Lockett and mentored by Deborah Hay. Both artists have practiced Hay's methods through solo commissioning projects.

The independent dancer does not have the same strong positioning in Ireland as is seen in the UK, for example, where major advocacy work has been carried out by organisations such as Dance UK and Independent Dance. Independent dance artists in Ireland often create work, improvise or collaborate with artists from other artistic media. Generally, contemporary dance companies in Ireland do not offer annual contracts and so there are no full-time dance ensembles. A number of independent dancers work with different Irish choreographers on a project basis. However, foreign dancers are often temporarily 'imported' from abroad to supplement the cast for projects taking place in Ireland.

#### 1.5.2 Britain

Following the establishment of dance in mainstream culture through ballet companies such as The Royal Ballet, Ballet Rambert and London Festival Ballet, modern dance in Britain was a break with ballet which developed mainly through influences from North American modern dance. The pivotal years were the late 1960s, when Ballet Rambert changed from a ballet company to a contemporary dance company in 1966. In the same year, Robin Howard, who brought Graham technique to the UK, established the London School of Contemporary Dance (LSCD) and associated company London Contemporary Dance Theatre (1967). According to dance historian Stephanie Jordan (1989) Cunningham and associated teachers visited LSCD soon afterwards and so Cunningham technique also became highly influential at that time.

Jordan (1989) writes of the speed of the development of a counter-movement to Graham technique as a modern dance form in Britain, which became known as New Dance. The New Dance movement arose within two years of the establishment of LSCD

and “brought dance closer to recent developments in the other arts and to the new experimental dance in the United States”, such as the work of the Judson era artists (Jordan, 1989:3).

British dancer/choreographer and academic, Emilyn Claid (2006), writes about the emergence of ‘New Dance’ in Britain in the 1970s. A collective of dance artists known as X6, named after the warehouse that was their base, emerged at this time. Their work reflected many of the prevalent issues uncovered through the feminist movement and radicalism of the 1970s. X6 contradicted notions of the pleasing, disciplined female body as exemplified by classical ballet, through a project which involved “re-claiming the realities of [female] mortality and reproduction from the transcendent desires of patriarchal spectatorship” (Claid, 2006:71).

During this period, which was influenced by the earlier innovations of the Judson artists, British dance artists re-evaluated codified dance styles and incorporated into dance the perspectives of somatic techniques, such as Body-Mind Centering<sup>20</sup> and Alexander Technique<sup>21</sup> as well as martial arts forms such as Aikido and Tai Chi. Throughout this period, Release Technique, which was introduced to the UK by North

<sup>20</sup> “Body-Mind Centering is an integrated approach to transformative experience through movement re-education and hands-on repatterning. Developed by Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen, it is an experiential study based on the embodiment and application of anatomical, physiological, psychophysical and developmental principles, utilizing movement, touch, voice and mind. This study leads to an understanding of how the mind is expressed through the body and the body through the mind” (Body Mind Centering Information, 2007 [online]).

<sup>21</sup> F. Matthias Alexander (1869-1955). “The Alexander Technique, a one-on-one teacher-student method, involves learning how to inhibit one’s automatic responses to the simplest stimuli—beginning to speak, getting up out of a chair, taking up oars to row a boat. Out of the experience of inhibiting the rush to do these activities, one learns how to move with more grace and ease, how to be more fully present in the movement” (Johnson, Don Hanlon, 1995:83).

American dancers, in particular Mary Fulkerson<sup>22</sup>, became widely used as an approach that prepared the body for a greater number of movement possibilities. Fulkerson was based at Dartington College and had been involved, as a teacher, with Strider (1972-75) which was the first “experimental and ‘independent’ dance group to emerge from LSCD” (Jordan, 1989: 35)<sup>23</sup>. Fulkerson’s involvement in the London New Dance scene was through teaching at X6 and also by creating the Dance at Dartington (1978-1980) festival, which brought together professionals and enthusiasts of New Dance.

Release Technique is still widely used by dancers and dance students today and does not employ a specific movement vocabulary, but rather requires that the dancer employ an attitude of introspection and sensitivity towards the body’s physiological structures. Jordan (1992:52) explains Fulkerson’s use of imagery as a fundamental aspect of Release Technique:

In release work’s anatomical aspect, images are used to structure the manner in which bones balance or articulate in movement: images of lines, bridges and bowl shapes in the body, of paths of action-flow, all designed to release the body into easy efficient alignment and action.

The re-appraisal of dance technique which took place in Britain in the 1970s was centred upon anatomical alignment and body-mind awareness and thus allowed choreographers to form individual ways of moving, with the anatomical reality of the body as the only limitation. This made dancers more active and empowered within dance-making, with many dancers exploring choreography and creativity through collaborative processes. Without the constraint of obvious aesthetic or expressionistic principles, which the canonical techniques imposed, choreographers could shape work that incorporated a

<sup>22</sup> In Release Technique, Fulkerson combined her knowledge of anatomy gained through study with Barbara Clark (a student of Mabel Todd (see 3.5)) and the work of Joan Skinner, who developed Skinner Releasing Technique (Jordan, 1992:52) (Franklin, 1996:9-10).

<sup>23</sup> Despite its short life span, Strider was highly influential on the development of New Dance in Britain (Jordan, 1989: 35-57).

variety of forms. This divergence from canonical techniques, led to the emergence of independent choreographers who sought to explore and express “originary” ways of moving (Foster, 2005:113).

To explain this term, I move away from the British dance scene for a moment, to a more recent article by Foster (2005) about the work of Judson choreographer, Elaine Summers (US), who was trained in Graham, Limon and Cunningham technique. According to Foster (2005: 113), Summers questioned “the process of training through which one’s own body becomes imprinted with others’ aesthetic visions”, resulting in a sense that “she was living ‘according to an energy pattern, a body imagery’ that was not hers”. Linking this back to the British New Dance scene, Foster (2005) cites Summers’s influence on British choreographer Rosemary Butcher who is a seminal figure in the development of New Dance and has also contributed significantly to this research:

Summers focused attention on body’s weight and economy of emotion rather than its shape. From practicing this awareness, Butcher remembers, her body changed, slowly shedding its habits acquired from the study of both Graham and ballet.

Foster, 2005:114

Through the development of ‘originary’ choreographic ways of moving, independent choreographers emerged. Subsequently, the independent dancer developed, aided by the growth of an infrastructure for dance throughout Europe and the US which took place within schools, festivals, dance spaces/venues, producers and resource agencies, making work as a freelance dancer into a viable career. This type of dancer nomadically traverses between different creative environments led by different choreographers. However, company-based dancers with specific techniques continue to develop alongside independent dance and may also cross between these fields of professional activity.

Independent dance trends have developed in different ways in different cultures and this creates variations in how the independent dancer operates and is regarded from country to country. However, there are sufficient consistencies that make it possible to examine this as a particular type of creative practice across nation boundaries. Indeed, independent dancers often operate within highly fluid international networks, a situation that is reflected in the international scope of this research project.

### 1.6 Homogenized Bodies

As outlined above, Foster (1992:493) uses the term “the hired body” to describe the type of dancer that emerged in response to the work of independent choreographers. Her use of the Foucauldian model accelerates in the text, as the dancer’s body is inscribed upon again and again by different choreographic styles. Foster (1992:495) writes that the hired body merges the distinctiveness of different dance approaches. She states that it is,

A purely physical object, [which] can be made over into whatever look one desires.

Foster, 1992:494

Foster (1992:494) posits that the ‘hired body’ “does not display its skills as a collage of discrete styles but, rather, homogenizes all styles and vocabularies beneath a sleek impenetrable surface”, forming a neutral dancer without the aesthetic principles to develop a distinct performative self. Indeed, according to Foster (1992:495), the result of this approach is the denial of the dancer’s “true, deep self”.

Although there have been many developments in contemporary dance since this text was published, it does highlight the shift from discreet styles to a proliferation of many ‘originary’ ways of moving and legitimate concerns with the resulting loss of distinctiveness. More recently, Claid (2006) wrote about this issue from the perspective of her time as artistic director of Extemporary Dance Theatre (beginning in 1981), a

repertory dance company based in London. She writes of her endeavour to incorporate the work of a number of different choreographers, each with a distinct choreographic style, into the company's repertoire:

I had underestimated the *time* it took for bodies to re-learn through somatic attention, despite their willingness to do so... Embodying a different style for each piece proved exhausting and unfeasible. There was no time to let go, un-do, re-think and allow the body-mind knowledge to do its work.

Claid, 2006: 137

The resulting overall movement style in the company was, according to Claid (2006: 140), a "middle mush"; "the thick, solid place that dancing can become when movement is predictable...having lost the play between precise points". Although Claid (2006) is writing about working with a repertory company rather than the independent 'dancer for hire' that Foster (1992) describes, her text is an example of an historical moment when canonical dance styles were breaking down through the emergence of circumstances that formed the independent dancer. It also reveals the challenge of incorporating a number of different movement styles in succession. Rebecca Hilton (11/07/08), a dancer whom I interviewed for this research, spoke of enjoying the clarity of working with one choreographer for an extended period of time and the clearly defined 'boundaries' that determine the choreographic style of the work.

I liked diving into this really clear aesthetic, like a boundary. If I do this [movement] I'm in a Stephen Petronio piece and if I do this [movement], I'm not.

The dancer's body in the twenty-first century, 'un-hooked' from the canon of dance techniques to follow 'originary' choreographic movement, can take a multitude of shapes and forms. I read the apprehension, in both Claid's (2006) and Foster's (1992) texts that, without the clarity of an in-depth understanding of the body, which the

acquisition of advanced skill in specific dance techniques impart, the independent dancer will collapse into inexpressive homogeneity. Claid (2006:140) writes:

There are so many performance and body-mind techniques available that the dilemma facing contemporary dance is not the elitism of a particular system, but the mixture and merging of many.

Foster (1992) makes a comparison between distinctive dancing bodies and the hired body, by focusing on the notion that the dancer loses definition through embodying many different styles. Having shown how each dancer is formed through aligning with a specific technique related to a particular dance style, she compares this approach to the hired body that is encouraged to train in numerous approaches and even to conceive of the body as a “physical object”, to be trained as an athlete in the gym. It seems that Foster (1992) is ultimately asserting that dancers working in distinct styles can be classified and dancers working across a range of different movement approaches enter an unknowable category. The dancer’s previous function, which was to perfect and perform a specific choreographic style and become expressive in that form, has developed into incorporating multiple inscriptions. Foster (1992: 495) writes,

The hired body ... threatens to obscure the opportunity, opened to us over this century, to apprehend the body as multiple, protean and capable, literally, of being made into many different expressive bodies.

With the advantage of hindsight, I disagree with Foster on this point and suggest that independent contemporary dancers embody multiplicity within one body. Thus, they indicate in an extreme sense the potential to display “many different expressive bodies” (Foster, 1992:495). The independent contemporary dancer demonstrates the body’s ability to display a range of dance styles. Yet, this research explores how these styles also leave their mark as movement traces to form the moving identity. I now turn to



current philosophical strands of thought on embodiment to examine the possibility of independent contemporary dancers expressing multiplicity in a meaningful way. I approach this firstly through re-imagining a concept of self that allows for multiple embodiments.

### 1.7 The Project of the Independent Contemporary Dancer

Foster states that each of the canonical techniques she discusses forms a specific ‘performing Self’, “that in relation with the body, performs the dance” (Foster, 1992: 485). In classical ballet, for example, Foster asserts that “the dancer’s self exists to facilitate the craftlike acquisition of skills”; in Duncan technique the project is to “achieve [d] simplicity in [its] movement and harmony with the self” ; in Graham technique, “the dancer’s perceived body, always lacking either in integration or articulation, must struggle to become more than it is—a quest that in turn, strengthens and sensitizes the self” (Foster, 1992: 486-492). Foster’s (1992) description of a performing self seems problematic in relation to current writing on concepts of multiplicity, by philosophers such as Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari and Foucault. From a Deleuzian perspective, Slavoj Žižek (2004) writes about the concept of self:

A Self is precisely an entity without any substantial density, without any hard kernel that would guarantee its consistency. The consistency of self is thus purely virtual; it is as if it were an Inside that appears only when viewed from the Outside, on the interface—screen—the moment we penetrate the interface and endeavor to grasp the Self ‘substantially’, as it is ‘in itself’, it disappears like sand between our fingers.

Žižek, 2004:117

It is unclear whether Foster is referring to the dancer’s performance presence or the construction of a particular embodied identity that congeals over time. Perhaps she is describing the different kinds of selves formed in different techniques as a ‘settling’ of

embodied acts into something of an identity. Therefore, this identity becomes located in and activated through, movement. Although this 'performative self' may be 'insubstantial' when opened up to scrutiny, it may also be experienced as very real for the audience and dancer in the moment of performance. It would appear that Foster's dancing bodies are crystallised into specific identities, through embodying particular choreographic styles. If this is indeed true, then do independent contemporary dancers change moving identities from piece to piece, or do they display a recognisable consistency in approach (which Claid (2006) suggests and is concerned about)?

It could be said that in contrast to a specific 'performative self', galvanised through participation in a singular dance technique, the independent contemporary dancer transforms from each project to the next, destabilising notions of a unitary self. This aligns with the postmodern Deleuzean view of multiplicity that regards individuals as multiplicities, and subjectivity as "not a stable given; ... [but] rather a 'collective' subjectivity which is to be produced" (John Marks, 1998:1). The practice of dancers who work within only one canonical technique such as Cunningham or Graham also provokes questions about multiple performing selves, agency and identity however there is a clearer sense of movement consistency evident in these practices. It is perhaps through the complexity and sheer variety of an independent contemporary dancer's career path that the question of multiplicity can be observed in sharper focus.

### 1.8 The Moving Identity.

As we have seen above, the independent contemporary dancer is defined, not through a specific style of movement, but rather through the engagement with many different choreographic approaches. This makes it more difficult to categorise movement styles within contemporary choreography as they vary greatly and are often influenced by both canonical techniques and somatic approaches. Therefore, I use the metaphorical term

'moving identity' to identify the dancing self (or selves) that Foster (1992) describes above and as a way of tracking differences across movement styles. It is the dancer in action, dancing, rather than a pedestrian everyday embodied self. As part of the research workshops that I facilitated in Dublin on 09/08/05, I asked the dancers to write about whether they experienced possessing a moving identity. One participant wrote:

I have patterns in my movement, so yes, I have a moving identity. The identity has been formed over years of dancing. Very much influenced by my training and then, in more recent years, by my own choreography and impulse to move. This too, is influenced by past choreographers and current teachers in contemporary movement. Movement identity is deliberate because of how I like moving and that I like, perhaps unconsciously to mimic choreographers' styles/work.

When exploring the variety of choreographic styles that currently exist, it is important to acknowledge that both dancer and choreographer have the potential to influence each other's moving identities. Geraldine Morris (2001) explores different movement styles of dancers who worked with British ballet choreographer, Frederick Ashton, and how each dancer's style influenced his work. She traces the training genealogy of six Ashton dancers and also discusses the physique of each, linking physical attributes such as the 'expressive feet' of a specific dancer to choreographic stylistic choices in his ballets.

It is evident from Morris's (2001) text that the influence of certain dancers can become embedded in the movement patterns and choices of a choreographer. Rebecca Hilton (11/07/08) spoke about this in relation to her work as a dancer with Stephen Petronio (US) and Lucy Guerin (Aus):

You change them just as much as they change you...I can look back at Stephen's earlier work and see me, not just actually me, but my contribution and with Lucy Guerin the same, I can see my particular influence on that body of work...It is the way we mark and scar and shape each other.

Therefore, in using the term 'choreographic style', I am describing not only a way of moving that includes the motor skills that the choreographer may have previously

learned, but also her/his specific formation of a way of moving through working through and with other dancing bodies. I also see this as the intentionality present in the passing on of this movement to others; as both a living repertoire of the movement genealogy of the choreographer and the specific movement form of the particular piece in question. I do not presume that choreographic style would be fixed throughout a choreographer's career.

In the following sections, I interrogate the 'moving identity' as it relates to the independent contemporary dancer. In order to outline the richness of this area of inquiry, I adopt a range of philosophical theories on embodiment. As the dancer's field of operation intersects with a range of physiological and phenomenological layers, it requires the use of a number of complementary and trans-disciplinary approaches, rather than a singular perspective. Therefore I draw on phenomenology (Weiss, 1999) (Merleau-Ponty, 1962), gender studies (Butler, 1989), postmodern theory (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987), experiential anatomy (Juhan, 1987) and Anna Pakes's (2006) critique of the scientific turn of recent scholarship and the philosophical challenges this presents for dance. I include a brief outline of some current research with dancers through the fields of neuroscience and cognitive science (Keen, 2006) (DeLahunta, 2004[online]).

### 1.9 The Sensory Engram

The way in which movement writes and rewrites itself across the sensory cortex is explained through the notion of the "sensory engram" which is articulated by Deane Juhan (1987:263), an expert in anatomy and physiology for body workers and health practitioners. Juhan defines the 'sensory engram' as the neurological imprint of specific motor actions on the sensory cortex,

The engram is the cortex's means of learning new skills and behavioural patterns, and of imposing them upon the primitive levels of our motor organization.

Juhan, 1987:266

When a particular motor activity is required, a subject recalls and reproduces the appropriate sensory engram and, when learning new motor skills, the new engram often overlays previous engrams as new motor skills are developed (Juhan, 1987). This can be an uncomfortable experience as habitual ways of moving are broken and patterns are re-set.

For example, when I made the transition from my classical ballet training to working in contemporary dance, the only way I might achieve an intentional fall would be to close my eyes and let go. These moments were hesitant and unconscious as I momentarily lost track of myself in space. I experienced this change from verticality to floor-bound contemporary work as a plunging into the unknown. I did not know how to let go and so I forced myself to fall. Ballet had taught me to force changes in my body. This change in movement approach took many years to accomplish successfully. Juhan writes that new engrams may effect significant changes on habitual movement.

Any given engram, then, may not merely encode a particular movement, but also a sense of 'style' which can permeate all movements, it is possible—it is even common—that we may, late in our development, master certain skills which in one way or another alter the style of nearly everything we do.

Juhan, 1987:273

The sensory engram is an important element in understanding how personal styles of moving are formed by past movement experience through the accumulation of choreographic engrams. The dancer, as a human subject, is specifically located in a unique unfolding of embodied experience. Therefore, within independent dance, each

dancer and choreographer's 'moving identity' is unique. It is constructed through a specific life path and range of experiences that make it particular to that person. Richard Shusterman (2006:4) explains that the "preferred repertoire of neural pathways" forms "the precise makeup of an individual's nervous system" and this resonates with the concept of the moving identity.

#### 1.10 Mirror Neurons

Mapping mirror neurons is an area of neuroscience research that has implications for dance as an embodied practice. Through brain imaging activities in monkeys, neuroscientists have discovered that mirror neurons are activated both when a subject performs an action and when she/he witnesses the same action performed by someone else<sup>24</sup>. J. Alexander Dale, Janyce Hyatt and Jeff Hollerman (2007: 104 -105) write that the localization of mirror neurons in "cortical regions" indicates that these have a level of plasticity and can be modified through experience or "approximations during observational learning".

Daniel Glaser (Tyson, 2005 [online]) at the University College London has engaged in recent studies of ballet dancers from the Royal Ballet and Capoeira (a Brazilian martial art) experts in relation to mirror neuron activity. Glaser's (2007) study indicates that more activity was recorded in the dancers' mirror neuron system when they observed movements that they had previously been trained to perform. That is, there was less mirror neuron activity observed when the ballet dancers witnessed Capoeira movements and vice versa.

The identification of mirror neurons has special relevance for dance in two ways. The first is that it indicates the way in which the dancer builds a repertoire of movements

<sup>24</sup> Giacomo Rizzolatti and his team began brain imaging of motor neurons in 1988 and first identified mirror neurons in a publication in 1996.

that once mastered, are understood neurologically and remain as traces in the dancer's neurological pathways. Therefore, the accumulation of movement becomes a mapping of territories which has a recursive relationship to the dancer's way of moving. Secondly, mirror neuron research indicates that once dancers reach a certain level of expertise, they can learn and modify their own practice through observing other dancers. This is demonstrated by interviewee, Sara Rudner's (03/01/06), account of reaching a level of understanding with the work of choreographer Twyla Tharp:

I could read the dancing from being external to the dancing. And this was shocking to me, that that could be a dancer's technique. That you don't physically experience it, but you could read the dance. So this was so ingrained in me, that I could read it like a language. But I don't know if I could have done that if I hadn't felt it in my own body.

Other research into mirror neurons explores their involvement in the enactment of empathy, the human ability to relate to or have an emotional response to the experience of another person. Suzanne Keen (2006: 207) writes, "neuroscientists have already declared that people scoring high on empathy tests have especially busy mirror neuron systems in their brains". The dancer's skill also involves engaging with the concepts, ideas, emotions, images and sensations of the choreographic schema and also forming this framework with the choreographer. Perhaps the fluidity of interactions between mirror neurons within the body-mind relationship indicates that choreographic movement could impact on dancers' emotional, mental and psychological states.

### 1.11 Physicalism and Dance

According to Anna Pakes (2006:87) current scientific approaches to the study of consciousness indicate a move towards 'physicalism', whereby "consciousness must [therefore] be explicable—if it exists at all—in physical terms". This has directed research towards mapping the brain activity of subjects in motion to yield awareness of

physiological functions, such as 'mirror neurons' mentioned above. However, when applied to dance practice, a 'physicalist' approach highlights the complexity of interwoven systems, leading to questions about when brain activity becomes thought or when intention becomes action.

Pakes (2006: 95) questions whether 'physicalist' approaches can account for the other dimensions of phenomenological or 'lived' experience of the dancer and the many layers of motivation and complexity that surround a dance movement.

A description of the physiology and neuro-physiology of a dancer raising her arm will not help us appreciate the complex of kinaesthetic sensations she feels, or other aspects of her phenomenal experience.

Although my research does not explore these issues in detail, Pakes's questioning uncovers the complexity of dance as a reflective, expressive embodied practice that straddles the body-mind and involves the interconnectivity of bodily systems and mind processes.

In 2002, British choreographer and artistic director of Random Dance Company, Wayne McGregor, instigated a research project with dance researcher and writer, Scott deLahunta (2004 [online]), using cognitive science methodologies. Entitled Choreography and Cognition, the project utilised input from cognitive scientists to open up the 'mind spaces' of the dancer and choreographer in order to extend creative options in the dance-making process. Indeed, McGregor and deLahunta continue to develop this type of research in various projects that aim to develop new models for extending choreographic possibilities through developing computational software.

As revealed earlier in the discussion of mirror neurons, cognitive science and neuroscience propose exciting new approaches to dance research. These research areas could potentially add value to dancers' status by acknowledging the sophistication and complexity of their skills. However, there is a parallel danger that dancers may be



objectified through this type of research, by being reduced to object bodies or sources of data, rather than human subjects who are engaged in meaning-making processes.

As I endeavour to map and expand on current understanding of the dancer in order to raise the quality of the experience for other dancers, I have chosen a phenomenological research perspective that situates me at the centre of this research experience. This is explained in chapter 3 where I adopt autobiographical narrative approaches to reveal my dancing process (see 3.4). In writing about a narrative approach to literary texts, American psychologist Jerome Bruner (1986:37), states that this perspective:

Leads to conclusions not about certainties in an aboriginal (original and objective) world, but about the varying perspectives that can be constructed to make experience comprehensible.

This research focuses on drawing out the inner narratives of dancers in order to map their movement experience. When interviewing dancers for this research, I was encouraged by the clarity with which they articulated complex bodily processes such as the relationship to movement as 'other', the ways that choreographic movement is imprinted on the moving identity and the embodied knowledge gained over years of this type of engagement and reflection. This demonstrates that there is a rich field of information that remains untapped and which could contribute to current knowledge of dance practice through the specificity of the dancer's human embodiment. In order to unpack the complex factors involved in the dancer's engagement with embodiment, I now explore how human movement operates through the frame of the 'body image' and the 'habitus'.

### 1.12 The Body Image

The 'body image', as a feedback system, is central to the practice of the dancer. Gail Weiss (1999) writes from a phenomenological perspective to incorporate the philosophy

of French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961), while expanding on it to include the importance of cultural, sexual, racial and social issues on the formation of body images. She writes that it is through the body image that we locate our embodied selves in the world and it is a “dynamic gestalt that is constantly being constructed, destructed and reconstructed in response to changes within one’s own body, other people’s bodies, and/or the situation as a whole” (Weiss,1999:17). The body image is formed through interconnection with the outside world and therefore no two body images are formed in the same way but are the result of the specific conditions of an individual’s life experience (Weiss, 1999: 16).

To be ‘dependable’, the body image must be flexible enough to incorporate changes occurring both within and outside of the body, while continuing to seek a certain ‘equilibrium’ which will provide the stability needed not only for effective bodily movement, but also for a relatively unified perceptual experience.

Weiss, 1999:18

When learning choreographic movement, dancers integrate the new information into the body image in order to re-establish a bodily unity that incorporates the additional movement. Interviewee, UK-based contemporary dancer, Catherine Bennett<sup>25</sup> (07/11/08) spoke about incorporating movement by Wayne McGregor in a way that evokes the function of the body image:

It was kind of an ‘outside-in’ process, quite image based. And I would somehow manage to map some images in my head that he was making on his body and then by using those images, bring it back myself.

This passage shows how the dancer’s skill involves consciously re-forming the body image in order to encompass new movement possibilities. Therefore, although it is necessary to experience a unity within the body image in order to experience perceptual

<sup>25</sup> Bennett worked with McGregor from 1997- 2002.

equilibrium, there must also be flexibility in order to incorporate the new bodily configurations. However, this flexibility also interacts with necessarily stable structures in the body image, effecting the oscillation between stability and change. Weiss (1999) quotes Merleau-Ponty in relation to the development of the 'habitual body', which engages with everyday acts such as driving a car, walking, standing or sitting:

It is an inner necessity for the most integrated existence to provide itself with an habitual body.

Merleau-Ponty in Weiss, 1999: 19

Weiss (1999) also suggests that in our quest to find perceptual stability, we run the risk of being 'hemmed in' by our body images. This hints at the potential for psychic limitation that results from restraining movement possibilities. Weiss also writes that there is a mixed fascination and repulsion, from society at large, for those who break the boundaries of the body image, such as the gymnast, the contortionist and the dancer<sup>26</sup>.

### 1.13 Breaking Bodily Boundaries

I return now to the notion of the engram as a means to identify the way in which the dancer's practice operates and to expand on this process of breaking through the boundaries of the body image. Juhan (1987) describes in detail below the way in which the human subject learns and retains new information, by overlaying new motor information over old neurological patterns. These older patterns of "primitive reflexes" and "stereotypical responses" are related to "millions of years of species development, and are inherited as anatomical structures" in foetal development (Juhan, 1987: 268).

<sup>26</sup> This perhaps also contributes to the dancer's elision from mainstream discourse as she/he breaks normal bodily protocols and therefore potentially signals 'anti-social' traits such as moral looseness or sexual ambiguity.

Engrams on the other hand, are built up from the life experiences of every individual, and are in many ways unique to that individual...Engrams are a means of arranging into meaningful sequences the firings of these primitive reflex units; they are the *organizing factor* that cannot be materially pinpointed<sup>27</sup>.

Juhan, 1987:268

In this way, the motor skills of the individual are updated through experience and, as previously stated, new motor skills can “alter the style of nearly everything we do” (Juhan, 1987:273). This process is heightened for the independent contemporary dancer, as it is a fundamental element of the dancer’s craft to learn and unlearn choreographic styles.

Choreographic movement therefore has the potential to impact deeply on the dancer by altering older motor patterns and responses. Bennett (2008) spoke of the impact that working with choreographer McGregor for five years had on her way of moving:

The vocabulary was such a seal, such a stamp on the way that I move that I felt very strongly about going through a process of shedding all of that. As much as I appreciated the speed and the articulation with which I had learnt to move in his work, I also felt that it was too much of a style in my body and my natural way that I improvised and I wanted to shed some of that in order to be able to enter another way of moving.

Bennett, 07/11/08

The ‘body image’ straddles the line between the embedded “anatomical structures” described by Juhan and the socially, gendered and culturally inscribed structures which form our sense of ourselves in the world (Juhan, 1987: 268). Juhan states “many engrams become developed to the degree that volition and ongoing sensory feedback play only minor roles in their function” such as when driving becomes ‘second nature’ (Juhan, 1987:269). In this way, these engrams become truly unconscious and embedded,

<sup>27</sup> However, recent developments in mapping brain function indicate that is indeed possible to pinpoint the material processes of engrams to a certain degree (see 1.10 -1.11).

their activation requiring little or no conscious thought. These unconscious activities form much of our actions as subjects generally, as do other processes, which work through us and are socially and culturally inscribed.

#### 1.14 Bourdieu's Habitus

An example of this cultural inscription is Pierre Bourdieu's (1930-2002) concept of the *habitus*, that is, the unconscious bodily enactment of socially inscribed cultural *modus operandi*. Bourdieu states that human subjects become inculcated into societal rules through the control of bodily behaviour and therefore, "the *habitus* acts through its bodily incorporation of *social relationships*" (Shusterman, 1999: 5). This forms an unconscious range of movement acceptable to the underlying control systems and cultural rules of any given society.

Although the subject may be operating in a variety of situations that are not exactly the same, she/he is able to adapt the rules of socially mediated protocol in order to apply the appropriate behaviour to each specific situation. Jacques Bouveresse (1999:43) explains that the concept of the *habitus* intervenes within socially mediated activities that are not explicable in terms of "the invocation of the rules on which agents intentionally base their behaviour or in terms of brute causality". These rules become integrated and at the same time, flexible, while not necessarily being understood or definable by the subject. When the subject makes this kind of unconscious yet somewhat prescribed choice, the *habitus* comes into action (Bouveresse, 1999). Therefore, according to Bouveresse (1999), on a daily basis the body unconsciously enacts and expresses inscribed cultural belief systems and embedded societal rules. This is one of the layers of society's inscription on the body and it is deeply embedded and unconsciously activated. The independent contemporary dancer must interrupt the socially constructed aspects of the *habitus* in order to engage in choreography.

Morris (2003) extends the notion of the habitus to encompass the activity of ballet dancers and this relates strongly to the concept of the moving identity. She maintains that the habitus can “censor, or filter out, information” (Morris, 2003:22). This is clear from her descriptions of the dancer’s limited ability to perceive or incorporate difference in movement:

Ballet dancers who perceive the ballet steps as style free and universally homogenous are prevented by their habitus from recognising not only the stylistic differences between training systems but also those between choreographers.

Morris, 2003: 22

Although classical ballet utilises a more stringent system of disciplining and shaping the body than contemporary dance, it is interesting to relate Morris’s article to the independent contemporary dancer who, although possessing a more flexible habitus, will still have certain movement limitations that are socially and culturally derived. The concept of the habitus indicates that the dancer ‘reads’ movement through her/his own sense of embodiment. It also shows how embodied experience, which forms the habitus, can shape the dancer’s ability to perceive differences in movement. This is also made apparent through recent research into ‘mirror neurons’, as outlined above.

#### 1.15 Culture and Gender as (De) stabilising Forces

In the social realm, embodied acts anchor the individual’s sense of identity in a kind of ‘gendered’ performance. Cooper Albright (1997:5) examines the ways in which “culture is embedded in experiences of the body and how the body is implicated in our notions of identity”. She engages with the work of Judith Butler in relation to the enactment of gender roles and how the performance of “repeated acts...congeal over time” to form what appears to be a stable identity. She further asserts that this identity can in turn be destabilised due to the “existential limits of performance” and the ways in which “repeated

acts undermine the stability of the very gender they are said to express” (Cooper Albright, 1997: 8). This instability arises from the difference that becomes apparent to the subject through countless repetitions of these movements.

Indeed, choreographer Jérôme Bel displays how repetition reveals difference in his piece The Last Performance (1998). In this work, Bel and three other performers each dance the same segment from a dance piece by German choreographer, Suzanne Linke. They all wear the same costume, a white dress, and state, “Ich bin Suzanne Linke” (I am Suzanne Linke) before dancing the movement. André Lepecki (2006: 61) writes that in a public lecture on this piece, Bel explained that the “perceptual question of how repetition unleashes series of differences” was behind the creation of this scene.

It is clear from the example of the body image, the habitus and gender enactment that there is no body that precedes society’s inscription upon it. Merleau-Ponty (2002:106) places the body as “the horizon latent in all our experience and itself ever-present and anterior to every determining thought”. Therefore, embodiment is always contextual—the body is always doing something. Even in the attempt to explore natural ways of moving in dance, Cooper Albright (1997:32) states,

What becomes clear to the student...is that this is a very conscious construction—one that, in fact, takes years to embody fully—and it feels quite different from one’s everyday experience of corporeality.

Cooper Albright, 1997: 32

For example, dance historian, Lesley-Anne Sayers (1999: 53), writes about the dancers in the work of British choreographer Rosemary Butcher, identifying the “quality of their neutrality”, which infers that this ‘neutrality’ is somewhat constructed and relates more to a performative approach than the achievement of ‘a neutral state of being’. Therefore, perhaps even a ‘natural’ body with ‘neutral presence’ is the result of the incorporation of a “body of ideas” (Foster, 1992:482) (see 1.2).

The embodied subject seeks stability and engages in repeated movements that congeal into a habitual body, yet for the dancer, that stability can be ruptured, or partially ruptured, by new movement experiences. Out of these examples of the body image, the habitus and gender enactment emerges the sense that the dancer oscillates between moments of stability and change. Cooper Albright (1997: 9) asks “how does one interrupt the ‘naturalized’ gendered physicality (the repetitions of which create a sense of stability) in order to stage the more ‘performative’ one (whose repetitions establish instead an unstable category)?” This interruption occurs through the interaction with new choreography, as the dancer is called upon to embody difference. However, this requires the dancer to be flexible regarding the stability offered through a ‘naturalized’ embodied identity and to suspend this identity in order to embody choreography. In order to understand how the dancer achieves this, I now examine the dynamic description of a Deleuzian perspective on subjectivity.

#### 1.16 Living with Instability: Multiplicity

The full body without organs is a body populated by multiplicities.

Deleuze and Guattari, 1987:30

Rosi Braidotti (2000) writes from a position that could be described as ‘the materialist school of the flesh’. She presents ways in which subjectivity can be interrogated through corporeal rather than conscious frameworks and locates embodied knowledge through a feminist interpretation of Deleuzian philosophy and non-dualistic accounts of subjectivity. Braidotti (2000:159) describes a Deleuzian body or ‘Body without Organs’ which consists of intensities and flows that supersede the hierarchy of its biological and symbolic organisation as



An assemblage of forces or passions that solidify (in space) and consolidate (in time) within the singular configuration known as an 'individual'.

According to Deleuze and Guattari's notion of multiplicity, a self is contextually triggered and is of itself insubstantial, as it cannot be located in any single place. Although human subjects project a consistency of selfhood, this is in fact an accumulation of behavioural patterns, memories and external stimuli, rather than the reflection of a deep, essential self. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) characterise human subjectivity as a series of 'becomings' always fluid and in flux, or as Braidotti (2000:158) describes it, "enfleshed complexity". She outlines below the Deleuzean body as

A field of transformative effects whose availability for changes of intensity depends, first, on its ability to sustain and, second, to encounter the impact of other forces or affects.

Braidotti, 2000: 159

However, Braidotti (2000:158-160) stresses that the transformative capability of 'becoming' is not limitless but contained through "an ecology of the self", as the materiality of the body presents real physical boundaries. This is not to say that she asserts an 'essential' natural body, but that she recognises the body as 'matter', rather than as a site for endless transformations. Indeed, Braidotti (2000:160-161) states that within the current Western "bio-political" and "geo-political" context, bodies are "abstract technological constructs". Therefore, the relationship to the body as self is highly complex, as it is mediated through "psychopharmacological industry, bio-science and the new media" (Braidotti, 2000:160-161).

The Deleuzean framework supports the exploration of the contemporary dancer's practice through rupturing the paradigm of the choreographer and dancer as singular and separate entities. Conceptualising the dancer and choreographer as 'forces or passions'

that engage in processes of becoming across a range of networks of interaction, as Braidotti (2000:159) would suggest, describes a fluid process of exchange. Braidotti's depiction of the body as both materially bound and a 'technological construct' reveals the complexity of the dancer's practice and the potential challenge in delimiting the boundaries of self-hood within the dance-making process. I now explore this challenge in more detail through the Deleuzian concept of 'de-stratification'.

### 1.17 Deleuze and De-stratification

As I have outlined above, as dancers break through their body image stability to engage with choreography, they also interrupt the habitus and the naturalized body. I propose that this experience could be related to Deleuze and Guattari's (1987: 160-161) notion of "de-stratification", that is the dissolution of the everyday signifying identity markers, which create a sense of a unified self. 'De-stratification' involves a revolution of the self. It requires subjects to 'shake off' the oppressive forces that connect them to social power matrices. Although they encourage this contravention, Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 160-161) warn that the subject has to "keep enough of the organism for it to reform each dawn". So even in the act of destabilisation, the subject needs to maintain some level of underlying continuity. This is an interesting concept for the independent contemporary dancer who 'disorganises' at the beginning of a creative process, only to re-organise in a different way that incorporates the new choreographic schema. If 'de-stratification' describes the dancer's process, this implies the possibility to transgress, or 'throw off' conditioned movement, which can limit and control embodied action.

Although dancers 'de-stratify', can they truly be regarded to transgress at all, as they are constantly connecting up with systems of choreographic control? I believe so, as through the variety of different choreographic systems they will encounter and the

constant forming, breaking and re-forming of 'moving identities', the potential for locating and following inner desires and impulses emerges. The process of uncovering and acting on these desires however, may take time and maturity of approach, therefore it could be said that dancers are initially *forced* to 'de-stratify' through their practical engagement with choreographic systems.

Braidotti's mediation of Deleuze and Guattari's endless transformations, through her assertion of the materiality of the body, could be of great use to contemporary dancers. Although dancers engage in endless transformations, they face the limitations of the body on a daily basis and this is not without material or indeed psychic consequence. For example, Ríonach Ní Néill, an Irish independent contemporary dancer, who participated in my research workshops, highlighted how unsettling this process can be over time:

It's more that because of how I've worked in recent years, with a few different people. You ask what's my movement identity, I don't have one anymore, all I can do is give on the outside of me what somebody else wants to see, remove the places that I've definitely wanted to go, and gotten rid of them and go somewhere else and it's like "none of this belongs to me". When I'm improvising maybe that's what I have to do, to find what me is, but it's like I've had plastic surgery.

Ní Néill, 10/08/05

There are also consequences for those who 'de-stratify' or break the boundaries of the 'body image' in the social stratum. If dancers 'de-stratify' in movement, they present an uncomfortable reminder of the 'performative' and thus 'non-fixed' nature of the signifying markers that create a sense of unified subjectivity. Furthermore, they are removed from mainstream discourses that require enactments by fixed and stable subjects.

In many ways, perhaps because of their ability to transform, independent dancers risk social exclusion from the cultural power bases still occupied by canonical dance. For

example training institutions may acknowledge independent approaches, whilst teaching through the more established and institutionally validated dance techniques. Similarly revealing are the social and economic distinctions made for example in New York City between non-funded experimental independent 'downtown-based' dance and 'uptown', nationally-funded modern dance and ballet companies.

#### 1.18 The Dancer as 'Shape-shifter'

Although Foster's definition of different types of dance aesthetics and styles are very useful within her text (1992), her reference to non-specific dancing bodies and particularly the 'hired body' are fundamentally problematic as they attempt to separate out the dancer as a dancing body in time and space from the choreography through which she/he becomes this body. If, as Deleuze and Guattari (1987) would suggest, the self is contextually triggered, then perhaps it is no longer sufficient to discuss the dancer outside the actual movement context with which she/he is engaged and *furthermore* perhaps it may also be insufficient to discuss the choreography outside the dancers who embody it (Burt, 2004). However, this point requires further examination, as choreographies do exist beyond the dancers who originally materialise them, when works are re-staged with different casts (see 2.11).

As we start to talk about independent contemporary dancers who may not be aligned to one particular recognisable canonical technique, there are fewer external markers to define them. The transformation from student dancer to competent Graham dancer is traceable, the shift from student dancer to independent dancer who may engage in a different choreographic style in each project may be less so; they may just look like themselves. In order to be discussed, perhaps they must be identified as specific dancers in specific works at a specific time.

I propose that the inclusion of the dancer's embodied experiential perspective in the arena of dance discourse will bridge the gap between the objectified interchangeable dancer who is identifiable only by the markings of the inscription of dance technique on the body, and the current reality of a dancer—in—flux who incorporates and co-creates many different choreographic styles, while living a 'normal, pedestrian life' with all the complexity that implies in the twenty-first century. Rather than beginning as 'neutral surfaces' that are inscribed upon, independent contemporary dancers enter the choreographic process with a range of experiences that have formed their moving identities. Although the moving identity can appear to be stable, it is also sufficiently flexible to the 'shake off' signifying factors that construct the sense of a unitary self, such as body image, gender and the habitus. This flexibility enables dancers to embody a number of different movement engrams and become many bodies in one body.

To conclude this chapter I would like to propose that the independent contemporary dancer is a kind of journeywoman or journeyman. Building a corporeal portfolio of enfleshed experiences and embodied paradigms, dancers invest in the bodily incorporation of ideas through interpreting choreography. They move from project to project, becoming bodies constituted by embedded movement in embodied traces. It could be said that as they merge with it, the choreography becomes another corporeal experience, which can reshape and remodel their way of moving or moving identity. Dancers metamorphose in the moment of 'becoming through dancing' and therefore, are 'shape-shifters'.

## *Chapter 2*

### *Finding Subject-hood: Dancers in Choreographic Process*

#### 2.1 A Haunting Machine

Choreography [as] is a haunting machine, a body snatcher.

Lepecki, 2006:63

In the previous chapter, I laid the foundation for examining the role and activity of the contemporary dancer, while establishing that the 'ground', even at a seemingly fundamental *bodily* level is unstable and un-fixed. This chapter is focused on positioning dancers and their relationship to choreography within dance theory and the political implications for dancers in becoming subsumed within their role. The dancer's subjectivity<sup>28</sup> is central to this enquiry, as is the way in which the dancer's presence is represented or elided within dance discourse. To address this, I firstly examine André Lepecki's (2006) text on choreography by approaching it from the viewpoint of the dancer. In this text the dancer is rarely mentioned directly, however, Lepecki's ontological examination of choreography projects a number of roles and functions onto the dancer which do not always resonate when examined through practice.

Lepecki (2006:1) interprets "the eruption of kinaesthetic stuttering" and the use of the still-act or minimalist movement<sup>29</sup> in some current contemporary choreography as an

<sup>28</sup> It is worth defining the way in which I utilise the many forms of the word 'subject' within this argument and the text at large. I adopt a post-structuralist sense of personhood which does not presume a unitary or essential self but rather emerges through practices which are constitutive of subjectivity. I use 'subjectivity' as a fluid description of personhood, which has yet to crystallise, whereas I use the term 'subject' as a person under the control of a subjecting or controlling force (which relates to Foucault's notion of the subject produced through the effect of external power (Gary Gutting, 2005)). The meaning behind the term 'subject-hood' is derived from Alain Badiou's (2005b) definition of the subject, with sufficient freedom to operate through various degrees of autonomy within certain contexts (see 2.3).

<sup>29</sup> This is exemplified by Jérôme Bel's piece Jérôme Bel (1995) which Lepecki explores in his text.

indication of the potential for choreography to be conceived as separate to movement. He states that much current dance writing is “attached to ideals of dancing as agitation and continuous mobility” and this marks a refusal to regard these new dance trends as anything other than “a down-time” in dance—an art form which is otherwise considered to be movement-centred (Lepecki, 2006:2). Through linking dance, dance studies and philosophy together (specifically postmodern and post-structuralist writings from Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari), he proposes “re-framing choreography outside artificially self-contained disciplinary boundaries” that link it solely with dance movement (Lepecki, 2006:5). Lepecki draws attention to dance’s ‘exhaustion’ through its compulsion towards constant movement and articulates how this impetus to movement could be viewed as the result of controlling and disciplining forces on the dancing subject.

Furthermore, Lepecki (2006:6) situates choreography “as a peculiar invention of early modernity; as a technology that creates a body disciplined to move according to the commands of writing”. He states that choreography is a system of control that has resonance with Louis Althusser’s theory of the ‘interpellated’ subject, who is called upon by hegemonic forces in the name of the “Absolute [*or ideal*] Subject”. This interpellation is made effective because, much like dancers, subjects are disciplined to enact their compliance “all by themselves” (Althusser, 1994:135 -136). This perspective on choreography denotes a type of indoctrination of the dancer into the structures of the choreography, implying an obedient performance of the choreographic script.

Lepecki (2006:9) posits that choreography “demands a yielding to commanding voices of masters (living and dead)... all for the perfect fulfillment [*sic*] of a transcendental and preordained set of steps...that nevertheless must appear spontaneous”. Therefore, choreography inculcates dancing bodies that are then commanded to move in a particular

way through specific choreographic structures. This relates to Geraldine Morris's (2003) use of Bourdieu's notion of the habitus in her study of ballet dancers. She explains that ballet dancers are "constructed individuals" and that "it is probable that most are controlled by their habitus", thus indicating the way in which external rules become internalised by the dancer (Morris, 2003:21) (see 1.3).

Lepecki (2006:7) locates the origins of choreography in 1589 as an act of writing<sup>30</sup> that created "charged relationalities [sic] between the subject who moves and the subject who writes". Although Lepecki mentions this in order to illustrate his point that choreography was not always associated with movement, by making this link, he infers that there is an underlying residue of this initial exchange that remains in the fabric of the choreographic relationship today. This proposed lineage would implicate choreographic practice very strongly as another system through which power structures are exercised on the subject in a Foucauldian<sup>31</sup> sense. According to this perspective, the dancing subject that is perceived in performance is created out of the play of power and discipline on the body. Furthermore, Lepecki posits, through his reference to Mark Franko's text below, that the dancer is engaged in the display of her/his own disciplined and controlled body in performance:

Writing on Baroque dance, particularly as performed by the body of the Sun King, Louis XIV, Mark Franko notes how the performance of choreography is first of all a performance centered on the display of a disciplined body performing the spectacle of its own capacity to be set into motion.

Lepecki, 2006: 7

Mark Franko (2000:47) makes the link between technique and power within baroque

<sup>30</sup> Lepecki (2006:7) cites the *Orchesographie*, the foremost dance manual of that period by Jesuit priest, Thoinot Arbeau, as the beginnings of choreographic writing.

<sup>31</sup> Foucault posited a body as an "inscribed surface of events (traced by language and dissolved by ideas)" as the result of the play of external power upon it.



dance. He states that a ballet of that period, Entrée d'Apollon (1681)<sup>32</sup>, “inverts power into technique”, as it was originally danced by Louis XIV. Thus, Lepecki outlines that choreography has not always been linked to movement flow, but was initially concerned with the display of bodily control and technique.

However, there have been many subsequent re-alignments of this relationship through modern dance, which broke from the power structures of classical ballet. Ann Cooper Albright (1997:18) states that as early as 1900, Isadora Duncan became a key figure in “re-ordering ... the visual priorities of dance”, thus bridging the distance between the audience and performer. Duncan,

Refused the visual poses of previous dance forms, establishing in their stead an exchange based on a strong kinaesthetic experience.

Cooper Albright, 1997:18

This indicates a shift from the display of technique and discipline, as described by Franko above, into a more *visceral* engagement with the dance audience.

The display of technique and discipline was also challenged by artists of the Judson Dance Theatre era, for example Yvonne Rainer, who explored a task-like and non-performative approach to movement in her seminal work Trio A (1966). Presenting non-virtuosic movement in choreography begins to erode the traditional representation of dance as a seductive display of technique and skill. Rosemary Butcher is an example of a contemporary choreographer who seeks “to decrease ... [the] skills [of the professional dancer] while using them” in order to represent performative states that utilise, but do not

<sup>32</sup> In the text, Franko (2000: 36) refers to a reconstruction of the choreography by Jean –Christophe Paré that cites sections from an original ballet notation by Raoul Auger Feuillet from Jean-Baptiste Lully's Le Triomphe de l'amour (1681).

foreground, the display of technique and expertise (Butcher and Melrose, 2005:200) (see 2.4).

## 2.2 Stillness as Revolt

Lepecki (2006:7) links the unfolding of choreography as an “art of codifying and displaying disciplined movement” to the development of modernity. Through adopting Peter Sloterdijk’s<sup>33</sup> (2000, 2006:37) notion that “kinetics is the ethics of modernity”, Lepecki identifies a relationship between modernity’s symbolic movement forward, as exemplified in the motion of progress through modernisation, and dance’s association with movement. Sloterdijk (2006:38) states that, “the meaning of ‘being’ in modernity is understood as ‘having to be’ and ‘wanting to be’ more mobile”. Therefore, according to Lepecki, dance which engages in constant movement cannot take a political stance in opposition to the destructive elements of modernity. He states that movement could be regarded as modernity’s “permanent emblem” and that choreography as a technology emerged in “early modernity to re-machine the body so it can ‘represent itself’ as a total ‘being—toward—movement’” (Lepecki, 2006:7). Therefore, Lepecki hypothesises that through stopping the flow of movement in dance choreographers can examine and critique modernity’s entrapment of a particular type of subjectivity.

Lepecki’s viewpoint poses a number of problems in relation to the activity of dance and specifically when looking at the moving experience of dancers. It depends very much on what is considered to be movement in dance and its kinaesthetic or ideological origins. Cooper Albright (1997:14) writes:

<sup>33</sup> Lepecki refers to this concept within Sloterdijk’s (2000) text “La Mobilisation Infinie”, Paris: Christian Bourgeois Editeurs. However, I refer to a later text by Sloterdijk (2006) in which he explores this link between modernity and mobility.

Much of the choreography and dynamic phrasing of ballet works to highlight the various signature poses of the ballerina, which become a series of mini-pictures punctuating the dancing with recognizable moments.

This describes a stop-start quality, rather than a flow of movement. However in the 1950s, the inspirational teacher Anna Halprin (1920—) explored creating a movement flow through “adopting a biological approach to movement” (Morrison Brown et al 1979:142). This is described by Sally Banes, as she traces Halprin’s influence on dancer/choreographer Simone Forti:

Halprin also taught [Simone] Forti techniques for inducing a ‘dance state’ in which the body is focused and receptive to impulses that set off movement flow.

Banes, 1993:11

In the first example above, the focus of the movement is to highlight the ballerina, thus it appears more aligned to the display of technique and power. In the second, it is to respond to inner impulses through achieving a “dance state” (Banes, 1993:11). The latter approach indicates a level of inner awareness and attentiveness that implies some degree of agency. In any case, each example appears to be the result of very different motivating factors.

Lepecki (2006:10) outlines the characteristics of modernity’s “mode or form of subjectification” as a process which “locks subjectivity within an experience of being severed from the world”. He questions:

How can a putatively independent being establish a relation with things, world, or others while remaining at the same time a good representative of modernity’s ‘emblem’: movement?

Lepecki, 2006: 11

Lepecki’s hypothesis is that choreographies that utilise a lot of movement (how much would that be?) have no choice but to re-affirm modernity’s notions of separation,

solipsism and entrapped subjectivity. Thus choreography, through its association with movement, will always be implicated in modernity's ethos. Lepecki uses this argument to outline the way in which certain choreographers have used stillness and non-movement as a force of resistance against the forward thrust of modernity's project. For example, Portuguese choreographer Vera Mantero, paid homage to African-American dancer and singer Josephine Baker (1906-1975) through A Mysterious Thing, Said E.E Cummings... (1995). Mantero used stillness to critique Portugal's colonial past and the objectification of Baker as the exotic 'other' by white audiences. Jérôme Bel also uses stillness and minimalist movement as a form of resistance to dance's representational qualities.

Although Lepecki's position validates the important work undertaken by choreographers such as Bel, Mantero and Xavier le Roy towards forming an ontological perspective of choreography, his argument creates an unfortunate binary between stillness as a means of resistance and movement as political compliance and this upholds the sense that dancers in motion are passive subjects enacting systems of control. Could dance movement have other connotations that do not implicate it in modernity's project? The still body is also in-flux, it is always moving to some degree.

As well as the external reading of choreography's association with modernity's forward thrust, Lepecki (2006:6-7) seems to be critiquing the underlying 'technology' of choreography. It is as if the act of adhering to the choreography engenders a passive dancer's body, surrendering agency and autonomous subject-hood in order to 'dance to another's will'. Lepecki (2006:10) further infers that choreography creates a sense of disembodiment that arises out of 'submitting' to its structures, which creates 'absence' or 'displacement' from the world. This is in contrast perhaps to the experience of engagement with the 'present' moment through embodiment that creates an awareness of our *interconnection* with the world. Maurice Merleau-Ponty writes about this, through a

phenomenological standpoint, positing that we are inter-subjectively interwoven with our experience of external phenomena:

Thus the permanence of one's own body, if only classical psychology had analysed it, might have led it to the body no longer conceived as an object of the world, but as our means of communication with it... as the horizon latent in all our experience and itself ever-present and anterior to every determining thought.

Merleau-Ponty, 1962:106

It is evident that adhering to pre-formed choreography may arrest this phenomenological flow, demanding the execution of prescribed movement during the particular spatial-temporal structure of a live performance. Through responding and adhering to a pre-formed choreographic script, attention is drawn away from the interrelationship with the world, curtailing the dancer's choice to follow other impulses that may arise in the moment.

However, in his description, Lepecki elides the material processes of choreography through prioritising the *graphic* aspect of the act. The uncertainty and fluid nature of embodiment means that there is always the potential for 'leakage' beyond the boundaries of controlling movements. This notion of the passive dancer does not address the creative activity with which the dancer engages in materialising the choreographic work. Therefore, his description is limited in relation to the way in which dancers are perceived in their engagement with choreographic methodologies. The following passage from my journal describes the working process with Jodi Melnick and shows how choreographies can be constructed through inter-corporeal exchange rather than 'written' into being. It also outlines the process of choreographic creation unfolding in non-verbal states as a 'movement practice'.

*Melnick begins by tracing a movement idea, dynamic or direction. We always work in and through movement. She plays with a movement form and then solidifies this through repetition while interspersing it with other options. Therefore, each repetition gives more information about what the form is, or could be. Throughout this process, I follow with my body, without trying to 'learn' the choreography, but rather to let its logic begin to settle. She focuses on certain moments to develop them further and to check other options for transitions or rhythm and dynamic. All of this interplay will ultimately impact on the quality and texture of the choreography. After we have 'played' with many choices, Melnick will clarify the parts of the body involved and the physical area that she is focusing on in each movement. This helps to anchor the choreography for me, as I can relate her visceral experience to my own.<sup>34</sup>*

## 2.3 Fluid, Dynamic Subject-hood

In countering Lepecki's (2006) claim that choreography constructs the dancer as passive and obedient, I will now draw on French philosopher Alain Badiou's (1937—) notion of the subject. Writing from a radical far-left (and anti-postmodern<sup>35</sup>) position, Badiou (2005b: xii) presents the thesis that "situations are indifferent multiplicities", without an overarching truth guiding them. He uses the example that the emergence of new situations such as

the victory of the market economy over planned economies, and the progression of parliamentarism (which [he states] in fact is quite minor, and often achieved by violent and artificial means) , do not constitute arguments in favour of one or the other.

Badiou, 2005b: xii

Badiou used the mathematical science of Set Theory<sup>36</sup> in order to dissect the ontology of ideas such as multiplicity and singularity.

<sup>34</sup> Also see 3.8 for a more detailed account of Melnick's choreographic methodology.

<sup>35</sup> Badiou challenged the postmodern philosophy of Deleuze in particular (see 2.4).

<sup>36</sup> "Set Theory is the mathematical science of the infinite. It studies properties of sets, abstract objects that pervade the whole of modern mathematics. The language of set theory, in its simplicity, is sufficiently universal to formalize all mathematical concepts and thus set theory, along with Predicate Calculus, constitutes the true Foundations of Mathematics" (Jech Thomas, 2002 [online]) .

Through applying mathematical thought to these philosophical questions, Badiou (2005b: xii) surmised, “a truth is solely constituted by rupturing with the order which supports it”. He names the moment of rupture ‘the event’.

Badiou declares that certain events produce subjects, according to their ability to respond to life changes which arise from these events. According to Oliver Feltham and Justin Clemens (2005), Badiou states “a subject emerges through an autonomous chain of events within a changing situation”—through an encounter with an event. One of the examples Badiou uses to illustrate this point is falling in love and following this impulse into a change in life circumstances. He articulates the way in which subject-hood can be lost if the person “breaks their fidelity to an event” (Feltham and Clemens, 2005:6). Therefore, Badiou proposes that subject-hood is fluid, in that it can both emerge and be lost as a result of action. Furthermore, in the space created by the rupture in any given situation, truth can emerge. This is also linked to the way in which political activism produces the subject through revolt. As Badiou (2005b:327) states “a truth is always that which makes a hole in a knowledge”. I understand this to mean a kind of ‘breaking’ with that which is already known or understood to be true.

How could this approach be translated into the dancer’s engagement with the choreographic process? Badiou’s (2005b) description of how one ‘becomes’ a subject indicates a certain degree of interaction with external circumstances. It involves an encounter with the event, the emergence of ‘truth’ and maintaining fidelity in the role of becoming a subject. If the choreographic process could be regarded as the event through which new truths are revealed, the dancer, through maintaining fidelity to these events, gains subject-hood within the situation. Fidelity to the event could involve dancers allowing changes to occur in the moving identity by breaking through movement conditioning or incorporating new movement approaches as required. In essence, this

would mean responding to the micro-events in the compositional process of choreography which rupture their previous sense of stability.

Badiou's notion of the event producing the subject through rupture resonates with the dancer's encounter with choreography. Movement patterns are interrupted as new ones form and in that moment of breaking with continuum, new insights are possible. Indeed, Badiou (2005b: xii) describes the 'event' as a "type of rupture which opens up truths" and states that it is not only open to the militant but:

The artist-creator, the scientist who opens up a new theoretical field,  
or the lover whose world is enchanted.

Badiou, 2005b: xiii

Having established that dance training and working practice 'pre-condition' the dancer to move in a particular way and that this is perceivable as 'moving identity', we could characterise agency as that which *breaks* this conditioning. In broader terms, Dee Reynolds (2007:1) introduces the phrase "kinesthetic imagination" to describe how dance can overthrow cultural conditioning through finding 'new' movement dynamics:

Kinesthetic imagination is an activity whose aim is given in movement itself, and is not fully transparent to the agent. It is both a response and an active resistance to constraining patterns of energy usage that are culturally dominant, and that shape the kinesthetic experiences and habits of individual subjects.

This has deep resonance with the choreographic endeavour to break habitual movement patterns in the creation period of a dance piece, in order to find new movement form. It also shows how choreographers can find new form through coaxing the dancer through thresholds of conditioned movement.

In a similar vein, Susan Melrose (2003, [online]) identifies the notion of "qualitative transformations" within expert arts practices. I interpret this term as referring to



moments of insight that cannot fully be planned for, yet appear as a supplement to all the ingredients of the performance; more than the sum of the separate parts. Identifying the process as 'chasing angels', Melrose states that these are elusive and intuited rather than consciously constructed; these are moments that cannot be made to happen. Yet, the choreographer creates the circumstances in which they can emerge in the moment of performance. These transformations seem to be the new ground that the choreographic process opens up. Within my own practical research, I experienced these moments as changes in body sensation, rhythm and dynamics.

In order to achieve this, choreographers must enter into the unknown to some degree. They must engage in an intuitive process in order to allow for the emergence of something new and perhaps indefinable. My experience in the three solo works was of entering these intuitive spaces with each of the choreographers. However, the qualitative transformations all had to occur within my body, rather than within a shared process of an ensemble piece. I link these moments of 'breaking new ground' to Badiou's (2005b) notion of agency through encounter with the event. The event, in this case, was the catalysing effect of the choreographer on my 'moving identity', when I was pushed towards 'de-stratification' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987).

As the choreographer induces the dancer to open up new terrains, this is hardly a moment wherein the dancer enacts personal agency. It is rather, *how* dancers respond to this rupturing of the known that creates a type of agency in their work with choreography. However, can the dancer create this rupture within the given structures of the choreography? If new movement firstly creates a rupture but is pre-disposed to being 'set' into habitual patterns, then agency may be realised but subsequently lost in the re-enactment of the now conditioned movement.

Once subject-hood has been gained, perhaps it could be maintained by approaching it through a methodology of 'mindfulness'. From a cognitive science perspective, Francisco Varela, Evan T. Thompson and Eleanor Rosch (1993) address the issue of agency through using underlying strategies informed by Buddhist traditional teachings. Varela et al (1993) identify the preconditioning that undermines human agency. They adopt the activity of 'mindfulness' as a means to break through this conditioning. Varela et al (1993:122) characterise mindfulness as "be[ing] fully present in one's actions, so that one's behaviour becomes more responsive and aware". This model creates the possibility to arrest the flow of habitual activity and to bring attention to the present moment. This example has relevance for dance practice because of the growth of interest in somatic techniques in dance, which promote a type of 'mindful' attention and are often rooted in Eastern belief systems (see 1.5.2). Somatic practices often work on developing this type of 'mindful' attention, to bring awareness back to bodily sensations.

My own experience as a dancer in performance is that once the choreography is lived through in performance on stage for the first time, it then has to be re-lived in subsequent performances, becoming a copy and then a copy of a copy. This requires concentration in order to draw my awareness back into the movement each time. Through the attempt to repeat a choreographed *crystallised* moment in time, I have experienced the conflict between the re-enactment of a past moment and the lived experience of a fluctuating present. Without mindful awareness, this has often created a sense of disembodiment and absence. In recent years, I have countered this sense of disembodiment through perceiving movement, not as fixed and stable, but rather as always in the process of being re-constituted.

The use of mindfulness as a tool in dance practice has applications in dance training. When I interviewed esteemed New York-based dancer and choreographer, Sara

Rudner (1944—), she described her approach to teaching technique class as dance program director at Sarah Lawrence College, New York. Rudner focuses on maintaining fluidity while building technical awareness by employing two fundamental premises; “one is stay in motion, don’t stop. The other is to creatively don’t [sic] repeat forms you already know, but find a way to get your alignment functioning for you” (03/01/06). Rudner’s rationale for this approach was to keep dance training focused on a dynamic type of engagement with a body—in—flux, rather than repeating habitual movement patterns that may ultimately limit the ability to incorporate new movement possibilities.

Rudner’s method maintains a dynamic relationship to embodiment that could form the basis for a powerful means of training dancers for the future. She promotes a sense of individuality that allows trainee dancers to build dance technique around their individual and unique bodily structures. This technique places the dancer at the centre of the learning process by exercising agency, making choices and building self-reflexivity rather than being a passive surface to be inscribed upon. Rudner’s (03/01/06) purpose is “to make technical practice a creative act”. It is clear that this approach prepares the dancer to have a dynamic relationship to movement that can then be transferred to creative work with a choreographer.

The dancer’s activity in the choreographic process is often based on receiving, absorbing or responding rather than instigating action. This responsiveness can perhaps seem problematic in relation to current Western social pressures, which promote self-directed individuality through encouraging subjects to instigate and control their activity. For example, in the Society of Dance History Scholars conference at Centre Nationale de la Danse in Paris in 2007, Ann Cooper Albright spoke of teaching dance to teenage girls. One of the significant challenges she identified was teaching them to take a receptive role

in Contact Improvisation work, to be guided by their partner. She stated that they were culturally conditioned to instigate and control a situation—to act rather than to respond. If yielding to the ‘other’ is read as non-agency, then the dancer’s craft will be read externally as subservient to the choreographer. However, if this dancer’s creative function is understood as a conscious activity that of itself has value, the dancer could be viewed in a different way.

By exploring mindfulness as one way of bringing self-awareness to the dancing process, it becomes easier to understand the power for agency that the dancer indeed possesses. Here are two examples of dancers, whom I interviewed for this research, speaking about their approach to the dancing process. Their sense of self-reflection belies notions that they are passive, despite the fact that the work they engage in is instigated and directed from outside their range of control. In effect, they are each building an artistic practice from a state of responsiveness to external stimuli given by the choreographer.

Often it’s having the option of not being a slave to the aesthetic somehow, where you’re really clearly doing it, it’s not doing you. I think it’s a power thing in a way.

Rebecca Hilton, 11/07/08

That thing of being grounded in what you’re doing, so that you know the place that you’re in but also trying to take yourself, or push yourself into a place that you don’t know. It’s the balance between that, I find interesting. That’s the question that makes me want to carry on performing.

Catherine Bennett, 07/11/08

The issue of gaining subject-hood may not be whether one performs pre-formed choreography or whether one improvises, but the quality of awareness in how one engages in these activities. The ‘how’ can ultimately change the power dynamic in the activity. Therefore, the Varela et al (1993) notion of mindfulness, in conjunction with

Badiou's (2005b) approach to subject-hood through breaking new creative ground as a dancer in the choreographic process, propose a dynamic viewpoint in understanding the way in which the dancer can be understood to be an agent. Additionally, this agency could be achieved without the need to rupture existing protocols, therefore bringing about Rosi Braidotti's (2002:70) notion of "becoming minoritarian".

#### 2.4 Breaking New Ground

Having explored the potential for finding agency through mindfulness in the moment of breaking new choreographic ground, I now search for a definition of independent contemporary dance as a practice that is built on the 'qualitative transformations' and 'kinesthetic imagination' that Melrose (2003 [online]) and Reynolds (2007), respectively, describe. Moving from Badiou back to Deleuze, I acknowledge that the former holds a more political stance in relation to the emergence of the subject than the latter. Badiou (2000) challenges Deleuze's philosophy, in which individuals attain subject-hood, stating that it is hierarchical, as it requires a kind of self-determination to move beyond limitation that Badiou believes is not accessible to all. Whereas, Badiou (2000) posits that anyone can become a subject in response to an event.

However, in relation to breaking new ground in choreography, Deleuze's (2004) description of the creative process is useful as he tackles the underlying forces that obstruct the emergence of artistic subject-hood. Deleuze does this specifically within the creative field of painting, yet this has clear parallels with the beginning of making a dance piece.

It is a mistake to think that the painter works on a white surface...The painter has many things in his head, or around him or in his studio...They are all present in the canvas as so many images, actual or virtual, so that the painter does not have to cover a blank surface but rather would have to empty it out, clear it, clean it.

Deleuze, 2004: 71

Perhaps even more so than painting, the choreographer and dancers' bodies are full of potential cliché, habitual movement and generic dance vocabulary. Indeed, the choreographic process is often centred on finding new movement form to express the specific concept of the piece. In the recent solo process with Butcher, for example, I wrote in my journal that she wanted me to have a different relationship to the floor than would normally be established within dance training:

*She [Butcher] really talked about not wanting a dance form to emerge— how this is something other than dance. That dance training prepares the body for a kind of response to the floor—a 'pushing into' it to rise up from it.*

Indeed, as mentioned earlier, Butcher (2005) endeavours to reduce the display of the professional dancer's skill and the presence of generic dance movement, so that she can find new expressive movement forms. Furthermore, it would seem that the display of the dancer's technical ability could hamper the development of the choreographic work by signalling other meanings within the dance. The passage from Deleuze (2004:71) below lends itself well to dance creation and to the notion of breaking habitual movement. This is to be aspired to in order to open up to new movement possibilities.

In short, what we have to define are all these 'givens' [*données*] that are on the canvas before the painter's work begins, and determine, among these givens, which are obstacles, which are helps, or even the effects of a preparatory work.

Therefore, when beginning a dance project, the independent contemporary dancer may be faced with altering or interrupting habitual movement as a fundamental part of the creation of the dance piece. In each of the four solo processes, I was required to find some strategy that was beyond my comfortable way of moving. I describe these 'breakings' in detail in chapter 3 (see 3.6 - 3.10).

## 2.5 Intersubjective/Intercorporeal Processes

I return now to Lepecki's (2006) potent characterisation of the force of choreography played out on the dancer's body. This description of the passivity of the dancer could perhaps be applied to many choreographic processes currently operating in dance. Yet, Lepecki's viewpoint indicates that choreography as a process is being read from the outside rather than the inside. When 'reading' performances, spectators do not often have access to the process through which these works were made. Although a choreographer may explain his/her conceptual starting point and the methodology engaged with for the work, we do not witness the finer details of the day—to—day process. In dance, perhaps this has a particular significance as most pieces are devised in the studio with the cast of *live* performers. It seems likely that the live presence of the dancers would influence the creative outcome of the work. So reading the work as a tightly controlled and clearly directed statement, straight from the choreographer, seems disingenuous. We can never know to what extent the dancer is performing her/his own subject-hood or exercising agency in the moment of performance.

Lepecki's description also reveals fixity in his position regarding the role and relationship of the choreographer and dancer. Underlying Lepecki's text is the sense that choreography, and by association the activity of the choreographer, has maintained an unbroken connection from early modernity to the current historical moment.

Sally Gardner (2007:37), on the other hand, highlights a general slippage in dance scholarship that presents a generalised and 'symbolic' binary relationship between the choreographer and dancer when discussing the choreographic process. She states that this is carried across all dance genres despite its origins within and specific relevance to the classical ballet model. Even in relation to ballet, this generalised representation is not watertight. Indeed, it is usual for soloists in a ballet context to contribute to the creative development of the work. For instance, there is much evidence of fluidity within the

processes of ballet choreographers such as Frederick Ashton, who often asked dancers to improvise throughout the choreographic process<sup>37</sup>. Gardner states that in the majority of current dance scholarship, the terms 'dancer' and 'choreographer',

Refer to a specifically 'modern' conception of dancing and of dance production consonant with a division and complementarity between 'art' (choreography) and craft (dancing), mind and body. This conception of dance creation arises from within ballet culture whose own history traverses and is implicated in the modern period and is linked to the history of (industrial, capitalist) 'production' more broadly.

Gardner, 2007: 36

Through reviewing three key dance scholarly texts (one of which, *Dancing Bodies*, by Susan Leigh Foster (1992) I have explored in the first chapter), Gardner indicates the ways in which this 'symbolic' relationship between choreographer and dancer, which evokes binary distinctions, does not adequately represent "the intercorporeal/intersubjective relationships within which dances get made" (Gardner, 2007: 37). Indeed, this research focuses specifically on this issue, through highlighting the intimacy of the process of creating choreography and the instantiated reality of dancers as they materialise dance works.

## 2.6 Artisanal Approaches

Gardner (2007: 36) explains that modern dance styles emerged mainly as a solo form and thus there was no division between the choreographer and dancer; they were "one and the same person". It was only when solo modern dance artists went on to make group pieces that "this necessitated the transmission of a personal idiosyncratic dance style from one body to the bodies of others" (Gardner, 2007:37). Gardner states that the process of choreographing on other bodies, in modern dance, did not intrinsically impose distance between the choreographer's role and the bodies of the other dancers. Rather,

<sup>37</sup> See Annabelle Farjeon *Dancing For De Valois and Ashton* in Carter, Alexandra (1998: 23-28).



many modern choreographers continued to perform within their group pieces, alongside their dancers. Therefore the choreographer, in this dance genre, did not necessarily assume a hierarchical position in relation to the other dancers, as would be more prevalent within the ballet tradition.

Gardner shows how “the interpersonal space” through which dance is made, and which can be represented through the modern dancer and choreographer dancing together, are rendered invisible through the depersonalisation of dance training within dance discourses. Gardner (2007) states that in Foster’s (1992) text, “the dancing body is an object body” and that Foster assumes that the modes of production of all kinds of dancing bodies are similar and based on the relationship to a technique, rather than to a specific choreographer. The missing element in Foster’s description is, according to Gardner, the intimate space and idiosyncratic method of production between dancer and choreographer. Interviewee, Hilton (11/07/08), spoke about the specific nature of the exchange between the choreographer and dancer and how it functions as a personal relationship.

And you can’t take it apart from the person. A set of information is in the person. So a lot of it is if you like the person, or if you can understand the person and I think that is particular to dance. It’s kind of beautiful, you’re really learning directly from someone’s body, directly from their body.

Gardner (2007: 40) articulates how, through industrial models of production, “artists/artisans lose control of ... [their] practices—becoming alienated from their own labour, losing the power of self-regulation and artisanal self-definition”. This explains the tendency towards the disenfranchisement of the dancer within many current dance

production processes, such as training systems and large, institutionally-based dance companies<sup>38</sup>.

Gardner states that modern dancers resisted industrial models of production and often operated through personally invested relationships that were based on familial, sexual or friendship connections and/or “unquestioning admiration” (Marcia Siegel, quoted in Gardner, 2007:410). Certainly, a key element in forming the signature of a dance production is the interpersonal/inter-corporeal dynamic between the choreographer and the group yet, if this dynamic is acknowledged, it is difficult to assign clear divisions of labour, and therefore artistic ownership. Tellingly, Gardner (2007: 41) states: “the dancing relationship between modern dance choreographers and their dancers is almost never conceptualised or discussed”.

Gardner’s perspective is refreshingly ‘corporeal’ through her renewal of a sense of the ‘human touch’ when writing about the dance-making process. This serves as an antidote to prevalent discourses in dance research, which often fail to conceptualise the material processes of dance production on its own terms. Lepecki’s (2005) text is an example of the privileging of the verbal and inscriptive above the material and incorporative model of dance-making. In this way, dance theory potentially ‘writes’ across the bodies of practising dance artists, whose experiences are rendered invisible. Kent de Spain (2007:59-63) writes of the “hegemonic nature of discourse itself” which necessarily imposes a linguistic framework on dance. Thus it glosses over, as he characterises it, “an inherently complex and downright messy somatic experience” (De Spain, 2007:59-63).

In her article, Gardner highlights the views of Sara Rudner (mentioned above), stating that Rudner “values a dance-making relationship that is ‘artisanal’....rather than one that is more distant, formal or industrial”, and that in Rudner’s view, one of the

<sup>38</sup> A common notion that I heard throughout my training in Ballet was the process of ‘breaking the student down in order to rebuild them’.

“regrettable” developments of modern dance is “the substitution of ‘the dance class’ for ‘working intensively with one person’” (Gardner, 2007: 42). The working relationship Rudner describes is more like an apprenticeship through dancing together to form the dancer. This is in contrast to institutional models of dance education, whereby the student engages with a technique that is disconnected from choreographic creation processes.

Indeed, Jodi Melnick, as a young dancer worked with Rudner in the dance studio over many years in what could be considered as an ‘artisanal’ as well as a cross-generational exchange. The outcome of this work together was not to produce choreographies but existed as a form of exchange between the two artists. Melnick went on to take over many of the roles that Rudner originated in the choreographies of Twyla Tharp, which implies that this was a transfer of movement information over a long period of time between the two dancers—a kind of apprenticeship. It must be remembered that dance information is carried across bodies and not generally through written or notated texts.

Rudner, herself a highly acclaimed dancer in New York in the 1970s and 1980s, created a choreographic work in 1975 that spanned five hours, to indicate the way in which “dancers are always dancing” (Michael Seaver, 2007: 14). The piece, entitled This Dancing Life, is an example of her artisanal approach to dance. It was restaged in Ireland, by Irish Modern Dance Theatre, in August 2007, on a group of sixteen Irish contemporary dancers and five US-based dancers who performed over four hours in a non-theatrical setting. In an article in the Irish Times, Rudner stated, “I want the dance to be about the dancers. Choreographers might think of wonderful ideas, but they are useless without a dancer to realise them” (Rudner in Seaver, 2007: 14).

During the performance we might rehearse difficult material before presenting it. I want the dancers to feel completely comfortable at all times. So I've told them we can rehearse the trickier bits and stop and repeat sections that might go wrong.

Rudner in Seaver, 2007:14

In this way, it seems Rudner has been endeavouring to present the craft of the dancer democratically, as an ongoing 'work in progress'. In her role as choreographer, she also performed a solo in the work and during the creation process, danced with the group in the studio.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, Rudner has created a beginning section for the work that can never be seen by the audience, as it commences before they are permitted to enter the performance space. Thus, Rudner creates a private space for the dancers, which positions their performance as not just focused on display, but instead highlights the dancers' personal relationship to the movement.

The durational nature of This Dancing Life and heavy cast numbers (a cast of twenty-one would be highly unusual for contemporary dance) goes some way towards challenging the more prevalent hour-length choreographic structure that can easily be slotted into a festival programme or touring opportunity. The hour-length format has become the norm due to the market-driven needs of contemporary dance programming and arguably forces particular working styles and relationships between choreographers and dancers. Rudner's piece originated in the 1970s and it is unlikely that dance artists would instigate this kind of inclusive, weighted work in current dance production climates.

I do not explore the market-driven nature of contemporary dance in detail in this thesis, but it is certainly a large factor in how dances are made. Xavier Le Roy addressed this issue in his lecture demonstration Product of Circumstances (1999).

<sup>39</sup> Both Katherine O'Malley and Philip Connaughton (interviewees and participants in my research workshops) danced in this production and spoke to me informally about the making process.

I slowly noticed that the systems for dance production had created a format which influenced and sometimes to a large degree also determined how a dance piece should be. Most of the time producers and programmers have to significantly follow the rules of global economy.

Le Roy in Helmut Ploebst, 2001:65

Rudner's 1975 work is intended to represent the reality of movement as an ongoing part of the dancer's life. The movement sections presented are studies in themselves of ideas and treatments of particular themes which have movement as the origin and end, rather than as a tool for expressing something else. Audience members are not expected to stay for the duration of the performance but rather to come and go in the understanding that even when they are not witnessing the performance, the dancers are still dancing. In my interview with Rudner she displayed her idiosyncratic approach through describing her impetus for making the first version of this dance piece:

I just want to keep on dancing, and I don't care how much the audience sees or if they see the whole thing, we're just going to do this, and we did it for five hours with no music and four dancers.

Rudner, 03/01/06

Rudner's approach foregrounds the dancer dancing in a democratic creative process which also involves the choreographer dancing with the group. It is one example of redressing the power relationship between the choreographer and dancer. I also mean this in terms of how the relationship is observed externally and whether the choreographer is seen to take a position outside of the work as the singular author. According to Gardner (2007), modern dance never distinguished itself as high art specifically because the choreographer danced alongside the group. Therefore, the modern dance choreographer did not create a separation between the art object (the dance) and her/his body.

## 2.7 The Signature Choreographer

On the other hand, concurrently with the democratisation of dance creation, the choreographer as a signature artist (whose signature writes across the work of other inputs) has emerged within contemporary dance. The general positioning of the artist within capitalist structures influences the choreographer's status. Although choreographers such as Jérôme Bel and Xavier Le Roy have challenged this positioning, the promotional culture for dance continues to foreground them as named authors of their work.

Gardner (2007:40) explains that the capitalist phenomenon of 'production' "suggests a subsuming of several arts within a totality controlled and directed from a position outside those arts". She explains that this is why, with the choreographer dancing alongside the group, it was difficult for modern dance to assert itself as 'high art'. More recently, the position of choreographer has begun to be identified with writing, conceptualising, theorising and owning the work, from a position of singularity that can register within theoretical discourses as either the choreographer outside the group of dancers, or the choreographer as solo *auratic* art object. The choreographer's role therefore has overshadowed the dancer as creative agent.

When the aura of the discrete art object dissipated under the habits and pressures of indiscriminate reproduction, the aura was displaced on the artist himself—a figure supposedly not given to duplication.

Schneider, 2005:33

It is interesting to relate Schneider's (2005) text to the emergence of signature choreographers in contemporary dance. She states that when the signature artist became the embodiment of her/his artistic oeuvre, the signature rather than the object itself bore the aura of the art piece. This shift also brought the *performative* into the art experience by linking the biography of the artist to the work; "the artist performing was a solo artist—

but more to the point, a solo perceived as *the self*" (Schneider, 2005:33). This has implications for the dancer's role within choreographic work, where the signature of the choreographer can also be seen to write over many different contributions<sup>40</sup>.

## 2.8 Erasing Dancing

Susan Melrose (2005) focuses on the work of Rosemary Butcher, specifically her collaboration with dancer Elena Giannotti, in order to examine the way in which dance production puts the dancer 'under erasure'. She questions:

What's in a name? And what remains, when the dancer's name goes under-represented, because it is the choreographer's name which seems to own the work?

Melrose, 2005: 175

Melrose (2005: 175) addresses this erasure by writing about Giannotti's contribution to the piece Hidden Voices (2004). She indicates, through her text, that Giannotti is not engaged in performing a movement vocabulary, but rather describes her as mediating a series of "fragile breakings, of unbearable continuity" (Melrose, 2005:175). Despite the minimalist nature of the movement, Giannotti's contribution is mediated by her professional expertise, which Melrose (2005:176) writes, "is consistently informed and modulated by her judgement—the most difficult quality to separate out from its effects". The issue of technical virtuosity does not seem to enter into this description, yet Melrose (2005:176) identifies that other kinds of virtuosity are implied which relate more to issues of "manifest professional judgement". Furthermore, through examining Giannotti's presence within the work, Melrose (2005:176) finds herself,

<sup>40</sup> Indeed, Susan Melrose and Nick Hunt (2005:70) write about the integral contribution of the stage technician as a *Mastercraftsperson* who materialises the work of directors such as Simon McBurney and Robert Wilson amongst others, by enabling them "to realise the technologically challenging works to which they put their signature".

Unable, on this sort of basis to represent Giannotti's own (signature) work by the reductive and objectifying term 'the body'—so widely used in recent years in dance writing and in visual arts writing.

Perhaps Melrose's examination of Giannotti's expertise cuts through the objectifying description of the dancer as merely 'the body'. It is as if the skill Giannotti displays in her ability to exercise a seemingly spontaneous yet well-mediated judgement in performance, starts to bring her out of the role of 'body under-erasure' into the discursive arena of the work. Or maybe through the act of noticing and recording Giannotti's contribution, Melrose *writes* her into existence and makes her body visible to established discourses.

It must be acknowledged however that the idiosyncratic nature of Butcher's work and her use of a particular minimalist movement aesthetic do not place it easily within a dance movement vocabulary (although Butcher is an important British choreographer and her work is recognized as engaging with choreographic conventions). Butcher's work does not use canonical movement forms or styles but rather explores minimalist movements in a very detailed and controlled manner. Therefore, this may be the reason that it is possible for Melrose to write about Giannotti's contribution in this way and to perceive her agency more acutely in the work. The movement does not objectify the dancer, but draws the audience into her 'alive-ness' in performance.

Butcher uses methods of construction that require the dancer to formulate much of the schema of the choreography. This is achieved through stimulating the dancer's personal associations and responses, to create a structure that then emerges from the dancer's life script. Something inherent in this approach seems to render the dancer more visible. I outline Butcher's creative methodologies in detail later in the text (see 2.13 and 3.6).



## 2.9 The Death of the Choreographer!?

In order to create choreographies outside a hierarchical system, contemporary choreographers have subverted the traditional position of the choreographer as sole originator of the choreographic material and singular author of the work. Many contemporary choreographers have been influenced by post-structuralist philosophers such as Barthes, Derrida, Deleuze and Foucault, who deconstructed the classical notion of a unitary self that is limited by the body “to finite co-ordinates in time and space” (Valerie Briginshaw, 2001:9). These choreographers have adopted methodological tools such as task-based composition, choreographic scores and dancers’ improvisation in performance to challenge the unitary author position. Many of these methodological tools are not new to the dance-making process. Yet, these contemporary choreographers utilise them specifically as a means to question representation, subjectivity and authorship and the political implications of these issues.

Barthes’s (1977) concept of the ‘death of the author’ relates to an anti-humanist idea that questions the singularity of the subject (in the classical model) and specifically the author as privileged subject whose work is given meaning through her/his signature upon it. He states:

We know now that the text is not a line of words releasing a single ‘theological’ meaning (the ‘message of the Author-God’) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash.

Barthes, 1977: 146

The ‘political ontology’ of choreography would appear currently to be under scrutiny from a number of prominent European choreographers such as Bel, Le Roy and Boris Charmatz, to name a few (Lepecki, 2006). According to Lepecki, (2006: 55) Bel in particular has uncovered a number of questions in relation to the choreographic role, questioning whether we can indeed “identify an author in its intentional singularity”. He

has critiqued the author-function in his work Jérôme Bel (1995), a piece to which he gives his name, yet in which he never appears onstage. In this way, the performers, the concept behind the work and its materialisation on stage through many collaborative elements are all contained by his name to become his 'body of work'—*his body*.

The use of choreographic scores as exemplified in the work, Schreibstück (2005), by German choreographer Thomas Lehman, involves a written score that is interpreted by three choreographers who each work with three dancers. By giving his name to the work, yet incorporating many layers of interpretation by others, including the dancers who improvised in some sections within a structured temporal and spatial framework, Lehman positions himself as the overarching author while democratising the process of the creation of the work.

Lepecki (2006) explores in detail the issues that Bel's works uncover, one of which is the limitations that representation in choreography exposes when there is an attempt to present the performer as a singular identity in the moment of performance. He paraphrases this question as, "in which ways is Western choreography part of a general economy of mimesis that frames subjectivity and encloses it?" (Lepecki, 2006: 46) Through this questioning, Lepecki (2006) could also be referring to inherent power relations within the choreography/dancer relationship and the ways in which choreography enacts systems of control over the dancer.

As a new wave of choreographers examine the performative state and engage in experimental choreographic processes with dancers, systems of control are challenged and there is more scope for the presence of the dancer's life script within the body of the work. Using choreographic scores and games to subvert the position of choreographer as author, the sense of 'transmission' of choreographic engram from choreographer to dancer may be less evident, yet I argue that the dancer in this case is still engaging with a

schema instigated by and co-located in the composite body of the choreographer. In fact, stylistic continuities are still evident in the work of choreographers who may not demonstrate specific movements or show steps but still create a particular style, which is generally considered to be consistent throughout their work.

Rather than externally manipulating the dancers' bodies who engage with the work, or seeking to represent over-arching concepts through his dancers, French choreographer, Boris Charmatz in Helmut Ploebst (2001:178) states, "the dancers are not part of the project, they are the project itself ". In describing the work of Charmatz, Ploebst (2001:170) writes, "the body [was] not just an instrument [e.g.] for creating an image, but encompassing reality".

This possibility to re-frame the dancer's role in choreography is mirrored in Kirsi Monni's (2008:41) text, which highlights the shift in the role of the dancer, in parallel with the breakdown of "Cartesian meta-physics". She states that once choreography moves away from representation, the presence of the dancer's lived body has the potential to reveal underlying processes of "being—in—the—world" (Monni, 2008: 41). The dancer's body begins to be perceived as more than just an objectified tool or "as material for representation of supra-sensible themes or ideas" within the choreographic process,

But it is also understood that an individual's perceptive action and conscious movement in itself is a unique way of thinking and therefore possesses a power for disclosure of reality.

Monni, 2008: 41

This is perhaps what Melrose (2005) perceives in Giannotti's performance outlined above. It is the live agency of the dancer, who is not trying to represent a character, emotion or theme, but rather is bringing her lived presence to the performance.

## 2.10 Dancing Subjectivity

It seems inherently impossible for the dancer to be a completely neutral presence in dance performance, as her/his subjectivity will always be present. The dancer's subjectivity onstage appears to have been fore-grounded in dance pieces by three seminal postmodern contemporary choreographers: Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker, Pina Bausch and Yvonne Rainer. These three choreographers (perhaps it is not a coincidence that they are all female) have embedded questions that seem to challenge the performer's subjectivity within their works.

In Rosas Danst Rosas (1983), Belgian choreographer Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker foregrounds and abstracts a particular type of subjective presence of the dancer. De Keersmaeker's work is arresting in the way that it traverses the line between real and performed subjectivities. Ramsay Burt (2004) uses Judith Butler's notion of the instability of gender performance in order to analyse the dancer's performance of subjectivity, with repetition being a key factor in how this site of ambiguity is displayed<sup>41</sup>. Burt (2004:41) writes that "De Keersmaeker's [choreography] is marked by an increasing recognition of the fragmentary and conflictual nature of embodied subjectivity"; stating that this is "exemplified through a confusing play between reality and artifice".

De Keersmaeker abstracts and choreographs moments of performed gestures, which would normally indicate personal and individual agency. In this way, the dancer's seductive performance presence is exaggerated through actions such as brushing her hair away from her face with her hand, gazing directly out at the audience and adjusting her costume. The dancers are still obviously obedient to this choreography but there is an underlying subtext that speaks of each dancer's potential to break with the choreographic score. De Keersmaeker's work walks the boundary of the burgeoning self-awareness of

the dancer, bringing it to the foreground, while simultaneously subsuming it within the overall choreographic schema.

In Café Müller, Bausch uses repetition as a means of crystallising what seem like spontaneous acts into maniacal (re)-enactments of entrapped subjectivity. Each dancer 'wears' her/his performance personality, which is often like an embodied psychological pathology; a personality stuck in a specific groove. The dance then, in certain moments, seems like a resting place of order in contrast to the chaos of 'acting out' the pathology. This exhausts and disorientates the dancers to the point that their real and performed subjectivities seem to become blurred.

Yvonne Rainer's Trio A (1966) also resisted norms through choreographing the performer's gaze away from the audience and thus avoiding a seductive engagement with the spectator. This was in order to circumvent the "narcissistic involvement of the performer" in the performance (Burt, 2004:36). Rainer endeavoured to bring the materiality of the body to the forefront through choreographing task-like, weighted movement so that the dancing body could be observed, not as exhibitionistic, but in the reality of its pedestrian range of movement. For its time, this piece marked a significant moment of rupture with performance norms, although it may not have the same effect when performed in this current historical moment. It is interesting to note, however, that this piece is still being taught by Rainer and is still performed worldwide within various contexts.

## 2.11 The Dancer and the Dance

One of the significant challenges in examining the dancer's subjectivity in performance is

<sup>41</sup> Ann Cooper Albright (1997:8) also uses Butler's concept of, "the existential limits of performance" in relation to dance and Lepecki (2006:62) identifies Bel's display of "difference at the core of repetition" (see 1.15).

the degree to which she/he can be perceived as self-representative, rather than aligned purely to the choreographer's intention. As William Butler Yeats wrote, in his poem "Among Schoolchildren" (1928), "How can we know the dancer from the dance?"

If the dancer is considered to be an interpreter of the dance, what indeed are they interpreting? Graham McFee (1992) addresses the way in which dances are not fixed entities but rather are also materialized through the dancer. However, his solution to finding a means of critiquing different versions of the same work (which presumably must alter through different casts) is to establish a clear notational reference point for the dance work that confirms whether the work was indeed achieved through the interpretation. Also, this solution requires that we establish the minimum that must be fulfilled by the performer in order to render it a true version of the work. This viewpoint relates more specifically to a moment in dance's history, where dance works were still emerging out of canonical dance movement. Currently, with the postmodern perspective and multiple performance possibilities inherent within dance practice, this approach is not usable. This is because it is now beginning to be understood that the performer co-creates the dance work on a number of levels, even when attempting to maintain a neutral presence.

The difficulty in reading dance performances is that one can never know from the outside how the final 'product' was created. Is it wholly the choreographer's intention that the dancer moves in a particular way? To what degree is the dancer being self-representational and what would that mean anyway? Claid (2002:33) has written extensively on the interplay between audience and performer and the ways in which the dancer can be constructed through the "specular" (or mirror-like) relationship in the performance moment:

I watch the performer and observe a real body becoming a performed surface, an illusion...The more her real body plays in becoming surface illusion, the more intriguing her performance becomes to my imagination...The oscillating relations between her real body and performed surface create an ambiguity...the ambiguity triggers a seductive play regarding what is present and what is absent, between knowing identity and not knowing, between depth and surface.

Claid, 2002:33

The site of ambiguity in dance performance, which Claid describes, this oscillation between real and imagined subjectivities (or what is imagined to be real) shows the interplay between many layers within the dance. There is the choreographer's intention and movement style that will create the atmosphere for the work and there is the dancer's particular and specific manifestation of the movement. Throughout these different layers, there is the possibility for many sub-texts to emerge and play across the overall meaning of the work. The dancer may be engaged in one type of movement, while unconsciously signalling other meanings. The moment of performance is when all of these elements, including the audience, come together into an unrepeatable event<sup>42</sup>.

Cynthia Ann Roses-Thema (2007) explored the dancer's perceptual experience by interviewing dancers immediately after they have performed onstage. Roses-Thema's research shows how specific each performance event is and how the dancer is required to adapt to a range of changing circumstances even within the same performance venue on successive nights. As discussed earlier, her innovative research approach positions dancers as 'rhetors' of the performance experience and highlights the complex and changeable terrain that they negotiate onstage (see viii – ix). Fundamental to Roses-Thema's (2007: xii) position is the understanding that the dancer 'produces' the choreography in performance:

<sup>42</sup> The 'surface illusion' of the dancer in performance was particularly apparent in Jasperse's solo (see 3.7).

The dancer onstage is not just mindlessly spewing out the wishes of the choreographer. Rather, the dancer in the action of performing is negotiating a multitude of variables making rapid in—the—moment decisions in accordance with their perspective of the unpredictability of the situation.

This makes it even more problematic to divide the labour of the choreographer, or to tell the dancer from the dance from the outside.

## 2.12 Processes of Emergence

To further examine the process through which choreographies emerge from specific circumstances, I return to the notion of conceiving the dancer as “the project itself” (Charmatz in Ploebst, 2001). This viewpoint presents a paradigm shift in the perception of the dancer’s role, as the dancer previously endeavoured to fulfil a particular ideal through engaging with a technique and choreographic style. It would seem that in this current historical moment, it is beginning to be understood that dancers manifest in different ways as dancers depending on the requirements of the choreographic process they engage with. Furthermore, choreographic works could be understood as the material traces of the inter-corporeal encounter between the choreographer and dancers. When working with Rosemary Butcher on this research project, I wrote about this idea in my journal:

*I don't feel that I am getting a style or a way of moving through a conscious attempt to fulfil Rosemary's aesthetic. Rather, I feel that I am building a structure on which to hang the form that is already there between us in the room.*

This journal passage alludes to my experience of being part of a working process that seemed to be unfolding in a specific way without the absolute conscious design of the choreographer. Indeed, when working with Butcher, many seemingly incidental circumstances arose that shaped the direction of the creative process. Butcher’s skill in



forming the piece which I discuss in the following section, Six Frames: Memories of Two Women, was evident in her ability to integrate many unforeseen events within the overall unfolding process (see 2.13).

An interesting concept that relates to processes of emergence and is beginning to be utilized by dance artists is that of 'autopoiesis'<sup>43</sup> (Slavoj Žižek, 2004). This theory has a biological foundation and was developed by Francisco Varela with Humberto Maturana. Elena Pasquinelli (2006:33) describes 'autopoiesis' as "the minimal form of autonomy that defines biological life". She states that this self-production process, "has the aspect of a reaction network, operationally closed and membrane bound" (Pasquinelli, 2006:33)<sup>44</sup>.

Autopoiesis describes the cellular process of emergence, whereby a cell will "create a boundary, a membrane, which constrains the network which has produced the constituents of the membrane" (Varela, 1996:212). This is a self-organising principle and when adopted as an approach to the choreographic process, it proposes an organic unfolding of material that emerges from the particular circumstances and constituents of the creative process. This concept is useful for choreographic practice as a way of working creatively with circumstances as they arise. It also offers the possibility to regard the specificity of the dancer's embodied-ness as key in shaping the choreographic work. So rather than the dancer being positioned to express "supra-sensible themes or ideas",

<sup>43</sup> Thomas Lehman recently held a workshop in 2008 in London at the Siobhan Davies Studios on 'autopoiesis' as a method of creation.

<sup>44</sup> "Autopoiesis attempts to define the uniqueness of the emergence that produces life in its fundamental cellular form. It's specific to the cellular level. There's a circular or network process that engenders a paradox: a self-organizing network of biochemical reactions produces molecules, which do something specific and unique: they create a boundary, a membrane, which constrains the network which has produced the constituents of the membrane. This is a logical bootstrap, a loop: a network produces entities that create a boundary, which constrains the network that produces the boundary. This bootstrap is precisely what's unique about cells. A self-distinguishing entity exists when the bootstrap is completed. The entity has produced its own boundary. It doesn't require an external agent to notice it, or to say "I'm here". It is, by itself, a self-distinction. It bootstraps itself out of a soup of chemistry and physics" (Francisco Varela, 1996:212).

as Monni (2008:41) refers to it, she/he is rather, an active element in unfolding the meaning of the work. Her/his presence is part of the material circumstances that forms the final dance piece.

In my work with choreographer Liz Roche (who is also my sister), in Rex Levitates Dance Company, the specificity of the dancer has always been an integral part of exploring a choreographic concept. As the company is project-based, Liz Roche would employ each cast of dancers based on the choreographic task at hand. Thus, she would imagine in advance how each dancer could fit within the choreographic schema in order to form the final choreography. This is not to say that all contemporary choreographers work in this way. However, there seems to be a growing awareness of the subject-hood of the dancer and the important role this has in the realisation of the dance. For example, John Jasperse created a dance piece entitled Becky, Jodi, and John (2007) in which he danced alongside Rebecca Hilton and Jodi Melnick (both of whom are involved in my research). This piece featured many of the life stories of the cast. Although it was based on the long-term professional and personal relationship of the performers, it was still conceived and choreographed by Jasperse.

### 2.13 Autopoiesis in the Choreographic Process

Is the act of choreography concerned with freezing moments in time, by crystallising inherently *fluid* moments into *formed* movements that themselves begin to take on a static texture; perhaps betraying through 'stilling' the very fluidity of movement they attempt to represent? Peggy Phelan (1996a: 146) writes,

Performance's only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Schneider (2001) however, critiques this notion, stating that performance does leave a trace, but it is not detectable through the conventional archiving process.

Does this also apply to the process that dancers and choreographers engage in, performing and producing movement in the creative process that must then be edited and re-structured to enter and form part of the choreographic schema? That is, does this movement therefore become *representational* of an original state rather than actually *emergent* out of this state in the moment that it is ultimately performed? If so, then how can we construct ways to counter this process and create fluidity in performance that allows for the fluidity of the performer and the movement of time or change in performance environments?

Choreography that is movement-based, yet does not wish to be representational, must then create a structure for the dancer to engage with that does not entrap subjectivity but produces a process of 'becoming' each time, while acknowledging the emergent nature of creativity.

What is real is the becoming itself, the block of becoming, not the supposedly fixed terms through which that which becomes passes.

Deleuze and Guattari, 1987:238

To relate this quote to the questions that I am outlining above, the choreography could be seen as "the fixed terms through which that which becomes passes" and the dancer as ideally, perpetually in a process of 'becoming' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). So, instead of fixing the choreography in a way that presents a problem for the performer of having to engage with, as Lepecki describes in relation to Bel's work, the "difference [revealed] at the core of repetition", perhaps there are ways for the choreographer to maintain a sense of 'becoming' for the dancer, through strategies laid down within the creative process (Lepecki, 2006:62).

As an example of the dancer exercising agency within a choreographic structure, Rosemary Butcher describes her work Six Frames: Memories of Two Women (2005):

It was clear that these dancers weren't just being filmed, performing a pre-established choreographic script. It was the performers' actual composition, unfolding in time, before the onlooker.

Butcher, 2005:202

Having worked as one of the dancers on the piece that Butcher is describing above, I will outline Butcher's process in creating the work, as an example of a working process that incorporated the live narratives of the dancers and created a fluid structure that operated within a defined spatial-temporal framework.

The piece deals with memory, two women (in this case, Liz Roche and I) reliving memories from their lives in real time in performance. This unfolding was accompanied simultaneously by a film of the two of us, performing the same movement score, which was synchronised with the live event. Through initial studio explorations, Butcher identified the movement parameters of the piece. She had started the process with a clear sense that we would be standing beside each other and this became limited to standing together in one place, without moving our feet throughout the forty-two minute piece. The piece had been inspired by a photograph which had appeared in The Guardian newspaper (UK) of two women from Beslan in Ossetia, Russia in 2004, who appeared to be sisters, looking out grief-stricken from the window of a bus. This was in response to the tragic hostage taking and murder of schoolchildren at a school. In the studio, we watched a video tribute to the memory of the massacre.

Throughout the course of the creative process, we constructed our scores from responses to tasks set to us by Butcher. These tasks centred on a series of thirteen paintings by American artist Jasper Johns, which we viewed at an exhibition. Each painting was a variation on the same theme and we used the differences between the

paintings as triggers from which to build a score. The piece was divided into six sections, or frames, of seven minutes each. We formed the individual content for the 'frame' by writing about aspects of each of the paintings. Here is an example of the text:

*The ultimate union of all aspects, not as beautiful as the subdivisions—yet all is in order and all details are present. Is it falling in or emerging out of? The pale blue of the mother's dress, the flesh has more contours and the clothes are softer—not so inhuman.*

Butcher instructed us to write down twelve of our own memories, which were evoked by that image, one example was:

*The photo of me under the sunflowers now lost.*

This describes a photo of me as a three year-old under a towering sunflower in a friend's garden. Butcher then asked us to look at the negative of this memory that is, the part that is not initially seen, as in a photonegative. In this case, the house behind me in the photograph came into prominence. Butcher treated each of the frames differently, for example, in another frame we looked at the rhythmical structure of the image and created from that perspective. Each different perspective produced twelve triggers. The twelve triggers for the photonegative frame were:

- |  |                         |
|--|-------------------------|
| 1. <i>The sea below</i>                | 7. <i>The tragedy</i>   |
| 2. <i>I see her in her bed</i>         | 8. <i>The set-up</i>    |
| 3. <i>The house</i>                    | 9. <i>Significance</i>  |
| 4. <i>My own wilderness</i>            | 10. <i>Womanhood</i>    |
| 5. <i>No-one would come towards me</i> | 11. <i>The melting</i>  |
| 6. <i>My beauty</i>                    | 12. <i>My fragments</i> |

These memories created an emotional charge and so the triggers each evoked energetic responses that would direct the movement in a particular way. In this way, we co-constructed a score with Butcher through incorporating meaningful personal experiences within her overall structure, hence the sense of alive-ness and presence that Butcher describes above. The score was kept private and never revealed to the audience or to

Butcher in any detail. It gave us a structure to refer to, while also allowing us to respond in the moment of performance to the impulses that arose from the triggers. Interestingly, Roche and I created quite different scores as we had interpreted many of Butcher's instructions differently.

In performance, the live work was placed alongside an edited film version of Roche and me moving through the entire score. Butcher used a recording of 1960s American poet Robert Lax reading his poetry aloud for the soundtrack. This linked the film temporally with our live performance of the written score and we had moments when we had to be in unison with the activity in the film and/or the words as Lax spoke them. The lighting design by Charles Balfour also highlighted each of us in different ways, at different times throughout the piece. The movement was very slow and steady and therefore it was possible to connect to these different structures without breaking the sense of constant slow motion. In this way, we had a very complex structure and series of stimuli, which were activating our movement, under a deceptively slow and calm movement vocabulary.

This working process is an example of ways of incorporating the life experiences of the dancer within the choreography, without assigning particular emotions to be enacted. The piece dealt with memory and so as dancers, we engaged in a live sense with our memories, within a structure that Butcher created as the process developed and became solidified into the triggers written into the score. In performance, with so much information to deal with, we were able to make new choices, while circulating within familiar territory, becoming both *free* and *restricted* agents. This approach, which utilised co-creative emergent becoming, formed a powerful experience for me as a dancer that was built on a sense of underlying stillness and engagement with the present moment.

## 2.14 Re-materialising Dancers

In drawing this chapter to a close, I propose to 're-materialise' the dancer by acknowledging the centrality of this role within the choreographic process. For, it clearly does not hold true that the dancer is passive within the dance-making process. This is evident in Hilton's (with Smyth 1993:73) account of her intersection with the work of Stephen Petronio as a dancer in the 1990s:

As a dancer in Stephen's company I make a lot of decisions. A lot of the work is made through improvisation and through playing with manipulating phrase material that we've been running for a year and that we know inside out and back to front. I have a lot of artistic control and input into the work.

The dancer's centrality is also apparent through Roses-Thema's research which shows dancers as key in producing the choreographic work in performance. So, although the dancer may seem to be subsumed within the choreographic schema, there is a layer of decision-making and personal agency taking place that questions Lepecki's (2006:54) notion of the dancer as "the passive executor" of the choreography or as he calls it, "the master's will". Melrose (2005) has recognised the dancer's agency within Butcher's work and Cooper Albright (1997:15) also speaks of the potential shift in power dynamic that results from awareness of the dancer's subject-hood:

The physical presence of the dancer—the aliveness of her body—radically challenges the implicit power dynamic of any gaze, for there is always the very real possibility that she will look back! Even if the dancer doesn't literally return the gaze of the spectator, her ability to present her own experience can radically change the spectatorial dynamic of the performance.

Lepecki's (2006: 9) text presents the choreographic act as an act of disciplining bodies to yield towards the choreographic schema. Dance has a strong legacy of disciplining the body towards producing aesthetically 'acceptable' movement as identified by the different styles highlighted by Foster (1992) in chapter 1. However, Lepecki's characterisation of choreography does not perhaps represent a broad enough view of the

variety of choreographic methodologies currently in use. Nor does it account for the possibility that the dancer may achieve subject-hood through interweaving her/his process of self-discovery and meaning with the work. By using the inscriptive model and characterising choreography as a written act, Lepecki inadequately represents the material processes of how individual choreographies are made. I would like to suggest that choreography emerges, through 'autopoiesis', out of the individual nature of each process of engagement by specific choreographers and dancers, at a specific time, thereby creating distinct choreographic works.

Postmodern writer N. Katherine Hayles (1999) discusses the disembodiment that has resulted through the adoption of technological models to describe human consciousness in the information age. She states that

Information, like humanity, cannot exist apart from the embodiment that brings it into being as a material entity in the world; and embodiment is always instantiated, local and specific.

Hayles, 1999: 49

If choreography could be regarded as a form of information, then it can never be seen without the embodiment that "brings it into being" (Hayles, 1999:49). In this way, choreography could be seen to emerge from a specific set of circumstances that arises through the intention of the choreographer, but also encompass the individualistic qualities of the dancers (culture, race, gender, life narratives), economy of production of the work (funded, non-funded and to what degree) and the situated location where the work is created and performed (prevalent cultural and aesthetic preferences, socio-economic status of dance and space to create/perform in).

In this chapter, I have posited an ontological understanding of choreography through the lens of the dancer. I have reified, through a discussion of current theories of subjectivity and my practical research, choreography's potential for breaking with



continuities, rupturing bodily stability and opening up new truths. The dancer has a specific role within this process, which is to enter into new movement terrain and to be the localised embodiment which Hayles (1999) mentions above.

However, dancers are materially 'messy' (De Spain) human bodies, who engage in 'intercorporeal' encounters with other bodies in the creation of choreography. Therefore, Gardner's description of the 'intercorporeal/intersubjective' relationship of dancer and choreographer is highly refreshing in this light, as it allows us to acknowledge the personal layer of interaction within the creation of choreography, which has previously been under-represented or downright ignored. Material bodies have often been displaced by an almost 'mystical' belief in the choreographer's authority within the creative process, leading to the erasure of the dancer within dance discourse and also to the discussion of choreography removed from the materiality of the performative moment.

Many of these erasures are unavoidable to a degree and stem from the difficulty of representing embodied experience through the hegemonic structures of discourse and writing. It does, however, seem essential to continually affirm the human material element of dance practice, which builds an embodied archive but leaves no written text. This is fundamental in distinguishing dance from other art forms as an embodied practice. It may also remove the risks of the dancer's loss of identity described potently in the interview with Ní Néill in which she relates her experience as a dancer to having had plastic surgery (see 1.17).

## ***Chapter 3***

### ***Solo Mapping: Multiple Embodiments***

#### **3.1 Corporeal Configuring**

*I have nothing to offer except to be acted upon. My speaking destroys the world. It takes up more space, creates more waste. Yet, how can I be expected to absorb without giving something back to the silence?<sup>46</sup>*

In the previous chapter, I explored the positioning of the dancer in contemporary dance practice, reflecting on ways that subject-hood could be achieved within this role. I also outlined different choreographic methodologies and the degree to which they incorporate the dancer into the choreographic schema of the work. In this chapter, I relate my theoretical framework to the practical research in which I engaged as researcher/participant with four choreographers. As outlined in the introduction, the four choreographers are Rosemary Butcher (UK), John Jasperse (NY), Jodi Melnick (NY) and Liz Roche (Ireland). Three of these choreographers created solo pieces on me, and these completed works represent a portion of the practical aspect of my PhD thesis. The fourth encounter, with Butcher, remains as a work in progress. Through these practical encounters, I interrogated research themes such as moving identity, the dancer's agency, creative authorship and 'autopoiesis' that is, processes of emergence.

The central aim of this chapter is to make explicit the outcomes from the solo processes and to link these corporeal outcomes to the critical perspectives that have been established in the previous chapters.

<sup>46</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, the indented text presented in italics is taken from my journal. This text has been edited slightly to correct grammar and to clarify meaning. As it was written closer in time and space to the moving experiences, it is included in order to add a further dimension of insight to the more linear text.

### 3.2 Methodology: Dancer-led production

I embarked on a three-day process-based exploration with each of the choreographers between May 2005 and July 2006. These were periods through which I established a working practice with each to fit the requirements of the research. There were many challenges to being a researcher/participant, such as maintaining an overview of the research while concentrating on being a dancer within the working process. This accelerated towards the end of the practical research, as the pressures of preparing the three solos for public performance took precedence.

The solos were performed as an evening programme entitled Solo<sup>3</sup> in the Project Theatre, Dublin, as part of the Dublin Dance Festival (DDF) on the 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> April 2008. The production of the solos was supported by a commission from DDF as part of my role as artist—in—residence with the festival from 2006 -2008. The involvement of DDF allowed me to produce and perform the works within a professional public setting. The resources available and time frame of the performances impacted on the outcome of the research significantly. For example, although I had intended to complete and perform a solo by Butcher, this was not realised, due to scheduling problems and a limited production budget (see 3.6).

The Solo<sup>3</sup> commissioning project was created as a vehicle through which I could explore my creative process as a dancer in three distinct solos. Although there are dancer-led contemporary dance companies that commission work, for example, George Piper Dances and Probe in the UK, it is still somewhat unusual for a freelance dancer to commission and produce work outside of a company structure and particularly so in Ireland.

There have been a number of solo programmes by dancers such as Maedée Duprès (Stephanie Jordan, 1992: 91), who presented Dance and Slide in 1978 at the ADMA

festival<sup>47</sup> in the UK and created subsequent projects to become a well-established solo dance artist. Two projects which relate particularly to my research were instigated by Stephanie Jordan in 1983 and Milli Bitterli in 2002. Jordan independently commissioned solos from three UK-based choreographers, Michael Clark, Micha Bergese and Mathew Hawkins, performing at the Place in London and subsequently touring to venues around the UK in 1983. As Jordan (1984) was also writing as a dance critic at the time, she wrote about the experience of performing these three works in terms of her physical and production-based preparations for the work. More recently, Austrian dancer Milli Bitterli created a programme of commissioned solos entitled In Bester Gesellschaft (In Best Company) by choreographers Wendy Houstoun, Christine Gaigg, Superamas<sup>48</sup> and Christine de Smedt, which was premiered in Tanzquartier Wien. A description of the programme on Bitterli's (2009 [online]) website reads, "In her dual role as curator and player, Milli Bitterli reverses the usual pattern 'choreographer seeks dancer'".

Positioning their work within a wider context instigated by the performer appeared to be a new experience for each choreographer. They each acknowledged the impact of this role reversal in different ways. For example, Melnick (25/04/08) noticed:

There were more restrictions, as we were all here at the same time, sharing her and had to fit into her world and her timing and her availability.

Whereas, Roche (25/04/08) spoke about how the particular circumstances of the Solo<sup>3</sup> project offered "an opportunity to do something different" from her normal practice as a choreographer:

It's also interesting to have to engage in something without having to make the whole piece, just to deal with one part of it.

<sup>47</sup> ADMA was the Association of Dance and Mime Artists (see Jordan, 1992: 60).

<sup>48</sup> Superamas are a collective of dance and performance artists based in Vienna.

Jasperse (25/04/08) seemed to be less concerned about this aspect of the creative process, but stated that he found making a solo piece “tricky”:

I haven't made a solo in a really long time for anybody and the only time that I actually made a solo was for myself. So that was very interesting.

Thus, Jasperse indicated that he might not have sought to make a solo piece outside of this particular commissioning event. So for each choreographer, there was a sense of being brought into a new working experience in which they had less control of the outcome than usual. Despite the more empowered position that this gave me as commissioner/project manager/performer, I maintained a dancer's creative role in the work. I achieved this by not imposing any opinions on the creative outcome of each solo. Within the limitations of production resources, I gave the choreographers as much creative freedom as possible.

My reliance on the choreographers to bring these works to completion over the time-span of the research project revealed the complexity of the relationship between the dancer and choreographer, which seems to elicit an inherent creative interdependence. This was clearly outlined through the dissolving of the working relationship between Butcher and I, where it was impossible for me to continue the solo process without her. However, interviewee, Sara Rudner (03/01/06) also highlights the power of the dancer in manifesting choreographic work:

You have no idea of the power you hold as the dancer, there is no dance without you—you are the dance.

Despite this inherent power that Rudner talks about, my experience of moving between the different roles of producer and performer highlighted that the dancer is more usually carried along by the dance-making process with less responsibility for the realisation of the work. Indeed, Rudner (03/01/06) had cited this as one of the reasons that she left her long-time collaborative relationship with choreographer Twyla Tharp:

All we had to do was go into the studio and dance. [She] Tharp took on everything else. She raised the money, she took the bookings...I had a very strong independent streak. I needed to feel myself a little bit more.

My role as commissioner, performer and researcher placed me in unusual circumstances as a dancer. However, as co-founder and co-director of Rex Levitates Dance Company from 1999-2007, I had experience of being in a producing role. One challenging aspect of this particular experience was managing this role outside of a company structure and thus being responsible for overseeing each aspect of the entire project. This position of responsibility conflicted with my tendency to relinquish creative responsibility in rehearsals. For example, I became aware that I do not deem it appropriate to comment on the choreographic work from inside the process unless asked to by the choreographer. I became aware of underlying beliefs that I hold such as, that the choreographic space *belongs* to the choreographer. This is because the choreographer is usually employing the dancer to take part in the process. By reversing these roles and paying the choreographers and everyone else involved, I became aware of my somewhat conventional views about being an obedient dancer rather than a creative collaborator.

### 3.3 Documentation—The Divided Subject

The documentation of the practical research took two forms. One involved recording twenty-minute extracts daily from the rehearsal session with each choreographer and the other involved journal writing for fifteen minutes at the end of each rehearsal session. There were challenges associated with the video documentation in particular which often created a split focus by representing an external eye (or 'I') in the studio. Also, by breaking the flow of the rehearsal to switch on and off the video, I extracted myself momentarily from each unfolding process. This required me to occupy a meta-position as both the 'doer' and 'overseer', which produced a type of 'schizophrenic' split in my role(s).

This experience created a series of paradoxical situations, requiring me to hold an outsider perspective within a working environment that needed my full creative engagement. It was challenging to attempt to capture relevant moments within the rehearsal process, both on video and through writing at the end of each day. The dancer 'hosts' the choreographic text and keeps it embodied throughout rehearsals and into performance. I became aware of how consuming this is, requiring intense concentration in rehearsals and subsequently, another kind of reflection when not moving that I describe as 'processing'. This seems to be the unconscious settling of new movement material that may be linked to Deane Juhan's (1987:266) notion of the sensory engram imprinting on the sensory cortex (see 1.9).

As I was submerged in the creative space of the choreographer, I was often unable to get an overview of what was happening. I was not necessarily able to see the most relevant moments from inside. Therefore, the raw data often *washed over* me without presenting any strong insights. By returning to the solo material through creating the movement treatise I was able to explore the experience of making and performing the works more deeply (see 3.11).

As I have outlined above, the time frame and limitations imposed by the DDF significantly shaped the three performed works. However, because I have had an on-going relationship with each of the choreographers over a number of years, this event could also be regarded as only one punctuation mark in my working relationship with each of them. As an independent dancer, earning my living through dancing, I continued to work with these choreographers on other projects in different settings. Throughout the entire PhD period, I made three new works with Melnick, Fish and Map (2003), Wanderlust Kentucky (2004) and Suedehead (2008) and one piece with Butcher, Six Frames: Memories of Two Women (2005). I also worked on four new pieces, which were Catalyst (2004), Resuscitate (2004), The All Weather Project (2006) and The Same Jane (2006) with Roche. I had

danced in a full-length ensemble work by Jasperse entitled missed/Fit (2002) just prior to beginning the PhD research. These projects took place aside from any work undertaken with these choreographers for my research.

Additionally, conversations and exchanges between the choreographers and me took place over the research time frame, as I met with each of them in different contexts. I also viewed performances by these four choreographers with other performers, allowing me to experience their choreography from the outside<sup>49</sup>. Beyond the confines of the Solo<sup>3</sup> experience, deeper shifts in my moving identity may have been taking place throughout the course of the research project. Therefore, although the performance was a significant punctuation mark of the creative process with the choreographers, it was more importantly an opportunity to reveal some of the ongoing experiences I have had while working with each of them. While creating an opportunity to research the creative process with each choreographer, the structure of the evening allowed me to embody each choreographer's style within one evening of work. This highlighted the process of moving from one choreographic approach to another in a more immediate and heightened setting.

Indeed, during the Solo<sup>3</sup> creative process, I was aware of transformations occurring in my moving identity. This was most acutely felt over the two days preceding the performances when the three solos were almost completed and I had integrated most of the movement information. While observing the rehearsal footage, I could see that my dancing body appeared to be more articulate and capable of displaying detail than in previous documentary footage. I had begun to execute the movements with fluency and there was a definition to my body shape that showed my muscularity. It was as if the choreographic schemata of each solo had been digested and was already showing its markings on my embodied form. This footage evoked Elizabeth Grosz's (1994:142)

<sup>49</sup> These performances are listed in the bibliography.



comment that the body is “marked” by the “corporeal commitments it has undertaken”, as I became the dancer for Solo<sup>3</sup>.

Before moving to the texts on each of the four choreographic processes, I now demonstrate how I constructed these written texts and the theoretical rationales behind my approach.

### 3.4 Tracing and Weaving Narratives

To be haunted by the dead means to be beset with sound, smell, taste, image, memory, after the material body is gone. To attempt to write about dance after the performance is over is to submit to a similar haunting.

Phelan, 2004: 15-16

In sections 3.6 – 3.9, I submit to the haunting that Phelan describes above, through writing about the dance experience after the performance event. I draw on embodied memories and sensations, as well as text from my journal and video documentation from rehearsals and performance to portray the experience of working on these solo pieces.

However, there are inherent challenges in writing about embodiment, which Cynthia Ann Roses-Thema (2007) identifies. Through her interpretation of neurologist Antonio Damasio’s (1994)<sup>50</sup> theory of how embodied experience is mapped in cortical regions, Roses-Thema (2007:3) states that embodiment is mapped as an ‘on-line’—‘in the moment’ event. It is registered as it is happening and alters from moment to moment because “the internal milieu changes from second to second”. She continues,

<sup>50</sup> Damasio, Antonio (1994) Descartes Error: Emotion, Reason and the Human Brain, London: Penguin Books.

The dancer learns to manipulate the body and create movement by speaking in the language of embodiment which is not linear, but simultaneous and synergistic. As a consequence, analysis of embodiment is fascinating, but difficult, if not at times impossible to represent in a sequential manner.

Roses-Thema, 2007:5

Thus, my task within this research was to bring the insights out of the experiential dimension of movement to interact with critical perspectives on the interplay between corporeality, sociality and cultural processes involved in the activity of choreography and/or dancing.

In her research, Roses-Thema (2007) solved this difficulty by positioning herself in the more objective role of interviewer, to bring embodied information out of the dancers with whom she was working. Her phenomenological research approach framed the embodied experience of the dancers, so that it could be included as source material and then analysed to show emergent themes 'fresh' from the performance environment. As researcher/ participant, I was not able to position myself so clearly outside the material of the research process. Therefore, I *worked* the research themes; firstly through the creation and performance of the solos, then through the movement treatise and finally through this written text. Thus, the research outcomes have been revealed in different ways through each different layer.

The solo experiences are outlined most clearly in this chapter as I write about excerpts of the working process with each choreographer. Finding a language to write about the experience of embodiment has been achieved through various stages of drafting and re-drafting texts that are drawn from the journal; transforming them from the non-linear and 'synergistic' to linear academic prose. I am aware that these texts are 'sign-posts' rather than fully representative of the embodied experiences of working with these choreographers. However, my intention is to impart a sense of the inner world of dancers

and their creative processes. This is to show that it is a rich area of insight and creativity that merits representation and further exploration.

### 3.5 Other Dancing Voices / Autobiographical Perspectives

Examples of dancers writing about their creative process can be seen in Claid (2005), in which she captures her experience as a dancer in passages that utilise an autobiographical stream of consciousness text. Externalising her inner voice alongside an academic appraisal of her themes produces a polyvalent text that shows the impact of dance training and dance as a profession on Claid as a human subject.

There have been a number of books by dancers who have 'divulged' insights from their inner worlds. Toni Bentley (1982) wrote about her experiences as a member of the corps de ballet of New York City Ballet in a revealing and insightful book. Gelsey Kirkland (1986) also wrote a revealing account of her training and professional life as a ballet dancer. Through externalising the dancer's inner world, these authors have cast light on the dance profession in a broader sense.

Jérôme Bel's choreography and subsequent film Véronique Doisneau (2004) is another type of exploration of the dancer. It reveals the career path of the Véronique Doisneau, a 'subject' (meaning a dancer who can perform both soloist and corps de ballet roles) of the Paris Opera Ballet who is on the brink of retirement. As a lone figure on the expansive stage of the Palais Garnier theatre she talks about her dancing likes and dislikes, as well as performing extracts of different pieces from her personal repertoire as a member of the company. Through providing a structure through which Doisneau's narrative can emerge, Bel presents a touching and insightful study of one individual dancer's experience within a large dance institution.

Sidonie Smith & Julia Watson (2001), with backgrounds in life narrative studies, have written extensively on autobiography. They re-iterate a post-structuralist approach

suggesting that, rather than being pre-formed entities that 'experience', we become subjects through our experiences. They argue (after Foucault and Butler) that a subject comes into being through discursive acts in which identities "are constructed. They are in language. They are discursive...not essential-born, inherited, or natural" (Smith & Watson, 2001: 33). They highlight the performative act of autobiography and its link to embodiment, stating, "life narrative inextricably links memory, subjectivity, and the materiality of the body" (Smith & Watson, 2001:37). It would seem, therefore, that personal narratives hold the traces of embodied experience and could be a valuable tool in accessing dancing experience and making it explicit.

A narrative account of embodied experience is central to this research and could be useful in developing future methodologies for enhancing the dancer's creative experience. Phelan (1996) writes that the body as, 'an organism in-flux' processes experience at a different speed to consciousness. She cites Sigmund Freud's exploration of the physical symptom in psychotherapeutic work as the root of this understanding. Phelan (1996:91) states:

Psychoanalysis suggests that the body's 'truth' does not organize itself narratively or chronologically.

Phelan proposes that narrative processes can be used to suture this split into a chronologically sound narrative of the self. This shows how language could help to create important continuities by binding together the pieces of an inherently fragmentary process, which requires the dancer to cut from one creative environment to another.

If as Phelan suggests, experience takes longer to register and be processed in embodied dimensions than in thinking processes, dancers' embodied experience may be trailing *like a comet tail* behind their mental configuring. Each new choreographic encounter may engender a minor 'shock' to the nervous system as the dancer enters (again) a new process. In order to resist a certain psychic disorientation, the dancer must

adopt a sense of continuity—a continuous sense of process—that stitches together diverse methods and choreographies for a subject—in—process. Perhaps through creating and externalising a personal narrative, which relates to their moving selves, dancers could ‘suture’ their embodied experiences to their ongoing life-scripts and create this continuity.

In the following sections, I have endeavoured to separate out the very personal aspects of experience, which are deeply interwoven with other more neutral awareness of phenomena, in order to speak specifically about the dancer’s creative configuring. As I have articulated in chapter 1, dancers’ creative practices actively amalgamate a number of different aspects of embodiment and so their narrative account of the working process could yield interesting insights on a number of these issues. Smith & Watson (2001:38) indicate this potential when they propose that “the embodied materiality of memory and consciousness is grounded in neurological, physiological, biochemical, perhaps even quantum systems”.

Before I write about each of the choreographic processes in detail, I must re-iterate that in no way do I represent a neutral voice within the creative process. As a dancer, I am the result of an accumulation of experiences and influences that have formed my approach to creating and performing. These influences have helped to form my dancing methodology. From 2003-2004, I worked intensively on a project with Irish choreographer Joan Davis in which she amalgamated aspects of the therapeutic process of Authentic Movement<sup>51</sup> and dance performance. This approach has greatly influenced me to seek a sense of authenticity in performance, so that the choreographic script appears to emerge as my own expression.

<sup>51</sup> Authentic Movement is a form of movement therapy which can also be used by dancers to enhance performance skills. See Pallaro, Patrizia, Ed. (1999) Authentic Movement: Essays by Mary Starks Whitehouse, Janet Adler and Joan Chodorow, London & Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

As a dancer with Rex Levitates Dance Company, I have developed my moving identity within an 'artisanal' and familial setting, rather than within a large institutional dance company. Therefore, I intrinsically seek a sense of personal congruence with a choreographer, evoking Gardner's (2007:37) writing on "intercorporeal/intersubjective relationships" in the dance-making process. As a mature dancer of thirty-seven, I am less likely to work with a choreographer without that sense of personal connection. Although, I endeavour to be open to change, I am aware that I do not represent every type of contemporary dancer or approach to dance.

In the following four sections, I write about the creative processes and give a through-line of my experience within each. In dance-making processes, verbal language is used as a way of passing on the subtleties of embodied sensation, rhythm and dynamic. This language is often poetic and image-based. Ideokinesis, which originated with Mabel Todd (1880-1956) and was developed further by Lulu Sweigard (1895-1974) and many subsequent teachers and practitioners, is a method that uses imagery to enhance anatomical alignment (Eric Franklin, 1996:5). It has infiltrated contemporary dance training as well as creative process. For example, in the three-day working period with Jasperse in 2005, he asked me to improvise with the image of *the femur bones of the thighs being like jet sprays of water on top of which the pelvis floats like a ball*. As Stephanie Jordan (1992:52-53) writes, in Release Technique imagery is often used to build sensitivity to anatomical structures and this can also be applied "to a choreographic context". Dancers may work with the sensations of feeling the *weight of the bones* or the *volume of the pelvis* (see 1.5.2).

There are traces of this poetic language of sensation in the following text. At times I refer to the *tissue of the body* and *texture of the movement*. These are descriptions of

sensation that may not be anatomically pinpointed but rather indicate where my attention is focused through imagery.

### 3.6 Rosemary Butcher Process

I met Rosemary Butcher during a workshop at the University of Limerick in 2001. Although at that time she asked me to dance in a project with her, the opportunity to work together did not arise until the piece Six Frames: Memories of Two Women in 2005. In the interim years, I attended workshops by Butcher in Vienna and Dublin and she mentored a piece by Roche, in which I danced, for Rex Levitates Dance Company in 2004.

For nearly three decades, Rosemary Butcher has been one of the UK's most consistently radical and innovative choreographers. Profoundly influenced by her time in New York, 1970-72, she encountered the work of the Judson Group [Judson Dance Theatre] at its height, subsequently introducing those ideas to Britain at her 1976 ground breaking concert in London's Serpentine Gallery. Since then, Butcher has developed her own movement language and choreographic structure. By her determination to remain an independent artist, her use of cross-arts collaboration within the choreographic process and her frequent choice of non-theatrical spaces to present her work, she has forged her own place within the European contemporary dance scene. An inspired teacher, Butcher's teaching practice has always informed her choreographic work. She has taught at all levels, from young children to the advanced student. She has been awarded an Arts & Humanities Research Board Fellowship and in 2007 the post of Senior Researcher at University of Middlesex UK (Rosemary Butcher website, 2009 [online]).

June 2005, London, during the three-day process—'Snap-shot'

*I seem to be unable to 'feel' at the moment, as if it is all too overwhelming. I see myself careering through the air, in this tight position; the body in extreme tension but free falling.*

In chapter 2, I outlined Butcher's working process on Six Frames: Memories of Two Women (2005) (see 2:13). When working towards creating a solo piece for this research, we adopted a similar working method of building an improvisational score that developed into a well-defined movement vocabulary. Due to the fact that we did not complete the solo piece together, the material from Butcher's process is still fragmented, yet it holds many rich insights in relation to this research. However, it remains in an 'ideal' space of exploration and discovery without having become solidified into a finished work.

This creative process took a number of different turns, but began as an exploration of the idea of 'falling through the air'. Butcher intended to create a work that could be filmed and then projected on a horizontal screen at the same time as my live performance of the material. She had used a similar effect of simultaneously presenting a recording and a live version of the same movement score in Six Frames: Memories of Two Women (2005). From the initial research phase in 2005, we found a number of body positions that evoked a sense of free falling. They were all situated on the ground and related to a sense of horizontality.

Butcher and I worked together again for one week in November 2006, during which time, we explored expanding these initial positions, through 'infusing' them with layers of instructions and information. I created a written score for each shape by notating my responses to a series of photographs she showed me. These photographs were situated on opposite pages to each other in a book. I wrote lists of words in two columns, with each column representing a photograph.

*Directed*  
*Detailed*  
*Advanced*  
*Calm*  
*Solid*

*Hard*  
*Blurred*  
*Distorted*  
*Overwhelming*  
*Elusive*



Following this, I created a movement response to each pair of words. For example, I began with the image of 'directed' and then changed energy to embody the image of 'hard'. I tried to embody both instructions at virtually the same time. This created a sense of internal duality through splitting my movement intention. Butcher's method created minimalist and detailed movements, with imperceptible shifts happening at times. We created a movement score that was not just 'written' but formed through its relationship to a series of meaningful associations. As the performer, I created my own internal code and language that linked these different movements together. In the movement treatise I spoke about this aspect of the work with Butcher:

*[It was] a process of memory and recall; connecting meaning with movement.*

Having written out the score, my task was to run the sequence together so that the movements became physically incorporated. As I learned and subsequently embodied the score, my absorption in remembering the sequence, sensations and words anchored my physical activity. Therefore, it did not seem to be important if I momentarily forgot the order of the movements. I had learned in Six Frames: Memories of Two Women (2005) that consciously trying to achieve the layers of tasks that Butcher set was more important than achieving these tasks. As long as I remained engaged with the task, this seemed to create the embodied state that Butcher was seeking.

Following this stage of the working process, Butcher and I both applied to separate funding bodies for the finances to create the film. With the added costs of making a film, this solo idea required a higher budget than I had already secured for the solo performances from DDF. Unfortunately, we were both unsuccessful in our applications and subsequently, the future of the work became uncertain.

Butcher agreed to continue the working process in the lead up to the DDF performances but with reservations, as by the time that we began working together again

in January 2008, a year had passed and her original idea had changed considerably. At this stage, she wanted to move on from the flying idea to explore a type of evolutionary process. She was interested in exploring the way in which form changes and develops through evolution by losing some attributes while gaining others. In order to pick up the traces of the original process, we started from the 'falling' shapes outlined above. Butcher used images such as 'folding' and 'cutting' to evoke responses. I wrote my responses to diagrams in a book by evolutionary theorist and scientist, Richard Dawkins (2004)<sup>52</sup>. These diagrams showed species' forms shifting through different stages of evolution. I transferred these into movements as before.

Butcher created a working atmosphere that seemed to overwhelm me, through giving many movement tasks on top of each other. She also played recordings of music throughout the rehearsal, which had the effect of splitting my attention. Her choreographic instructions were abstract and image-based, so it was often difficult to follow these rationally. My conscious mind became overloaded and at times, the rehearsal process itself seemed like an improvisation. I understood Butcher's instructions at various levels, both consciously and unconsciously. Sometimes these instructions did not make sense to me, but still inspired creative responses without much conscious intervention on my part. When reading my journal passages on her work, my language seems quite stilted and I write about 'feeling empty' and 'numb'. I also write at times of being very inspired and excited about being able to access deep insights through the work:

*I find that I am thinking about my own life, as if this process is pushing me into a deeper connection with myself.*

Butcher's methodology seemed to be aimed at bypassing conscious configuring in order to tap into creative undercurrents connected to the themes of the work. I wrote in my

<sup>52</sup> Dawkins, Richard (2004) The Ancestor's Tale: A Pilgrimage to the Dawn of Evolution, New York: Houghton Mifflin Company.

journal that I felt as if I was building a choreographic score on which to hang the form that was already unconsciously present between us in the room. This denotes my perception of the emergent nature of the process from the inside. This process of emergence also evoked what Gardner (2007) describes as the “intercorporeal/intersubjective relationships” in the dance-making process, as we were both forming the piece but were also the ‘material’ that shaped the work. This process made me aware of how the dancer and choreographer form a ‘matrix’ out of which the form of the piece emerges. Through building layers of meaning and association, we created a particular ‘universe’ that had a specific logic. I felt this very acutely in Six Frames: Memories of Two Women (2005) where it would have been unthinkable to move outside of a specific range of movement. Thus Butcher seemed to create a movement style that prescribed movement in a similar way to the habitus, as the movement range was defined but also improvised from a set of internalised rules (see 1.14).

As the dancer in this process, I felt that my life script was intrinsically linked into the movement research. However, this did not mean that I felt ‘centred’ in the work. In fact, the experience was of being *acted upon* as if I was being constructed through Butcher’s language. Yet, this language resonated deeply with embodied layers of memory, emotion and psychological phenomena. Butcher’s continuous layering of one task on another, triggered unconscious states from which many deep associations emerged.

I demonstrated a small extract of Butcher’s choreography in the movement treatise (DVD Menu 2, Hauntings and Tracings, 08:05-10:25). This sequence resulted from the task of transcribing an earlier movement section from facing downwards to facing upwards. In this position, I had to remember the original impetus for each movement and its place in sequence while also transcribing this onto a completely different body position and with a different range of movement available to me. My moving identity has a functional quality in

this sequence, as I am balancing. Even small movements are significant because subtle shifts can alter the shape and weight placement of the whole body. The head is dropped back and so it loses its hierarchical position at the top of the body. This also interferes with my habitual posture, which is built on verticality. Thus, the position requires me to surrender control and person-hood. The upwards-facing movement evoked the sensation of the beginning of animal life on dry land. The strain embedded in the movement seemed to reference the evolutionary trajectory from the containment of the sea into encountering gravity to support the weight of a body.

#### Notes taken throughout the process with Butcher

*At one point, Butcher said that the piece was about coming to terms with oneself. I took this on personally. I noticed a sense of coming into my body and accepting the weighted flesh of it and its potential for decay<sup>53</sup>.*

*I think to myself that this movement is like a homecoming. The form is not pre-cast or set; words are not written first. We engage in and acknowledge our process of interpretation from the outset. Although it is Butcher's vision, something is being shaped by both of us and I am anchoring it through my embodied self into a movement score.*

*We talk about duality—how my movements are so small in response to these words that can trigger huge sensations. Because we limit the reaction in the body, perhaps the states of being remain to be felt by the spectator. In this rehearsal, the spectator is Butcher. She says that it is very touching to watch these 'micro-movements'.*

The work with Butcher made me aware of the process of connecting meaning into movement in a way that almost feels as if it becomes lodged in the body's tissue. It also gave me a sense of how my creative process as a dancer is interwoven with my everyday life experiences. Perhaps this is because her work has few references to canonical dance practices and is focused on the body moving (often a pedestrian body), rather than dancing. Butcher seems to be capable of weaving in many threads of meaning into her creative process in a way that deeply affected me as a dancer and uncovered many layers

<sup>53</sup> I made reference to this in the movement treatise: "coming into my body; the potential for decay".

of personal experience and insight. The most significant impact of this work on me has been a sense of dropping down into the deep stillness of embodiment.

Ultimately, Butcher decided that she could not complete the solo, as she did not feel that there were sufficient resources to achieve the technical elements involving film and projection for the DDF. However, it has been possible to weave the insights gained throughout the creative encounter with Butcher into my research outcomes and, as mentioned above, an extract of her process is included in the movement treatise.

### 3.7 John Jasperse Process

My first working experience with John Jasperse was in 2002, on a project with Irish Modern Dance Theatre, entitled missed Fit. Jasperse is Artistic Director/choreographer of John Jasperse Company based in New York. His work has been performed in festivals and venues in the U.S., Brazil, Israel and Japan and throughout Europe. He has created commissioned works for Baryshnikov's White Oak Dance Project (2000), Batsheva Dance Company, Israel (2000) and the Lyon Opéra Ballet, France (2002). He has received numerous fellowships, awards and prizes including a Guggenheim Fellowship and a New York Dance and Performance ("Bessie") Award.

Two months after the performances at DDF, Jasperse premiered a new work, entitled Pure (2008) in the American Dance Festival. This was a group piece, which was a further development of ideas that he used in this solo.

#### January 2008, New York, beginning of solo process—'Snap shot'

*We're rehearsing in the studios at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. We do a lot of back and forth improvisation. Some of the improvisations are very comical and playful. We also experiment with me moving through the wall sequence and trying to externalise my inner monologue as I move. John says that this makes me sound very neurotic.*

At the beginning of the solo, I appear in a video projection on the back wall of the theatre. I explain to the audience that although Jasperse and I had been interested in working

together, we did not create a solo piece and therefore, I will not be present at the performance. Towards the end of this announcement, I enter the space (the real me), moving on a brightly coloured backcloth wearing a costume made of the same fabric as the backcloth. I am the dancer as wallpaper. In the next section, I execute a single pirouette a number of times and after each turn I critique my own performance. Thus, I break the silence and illusion of calm, becoming the dancer as self-critic.

After momentarily leaving the stage, I re-enter to vaudeville music and produce three balls with which I perform a number of badly executed magic tricks, becoming a 'showman'. Following this, I move slowly upstage while transforming my performance presence into an almost 'balletic' style to Pachelbel's Canon. I have been tracing the movement of the coming phrase, which I then begin to dance. It is a complicated phrase that twists and turns, constantly changing direction. The phrase displays technical ability and I indulge in the details of the movement. Finally, I leave the stage, to return dragging a heavy sack. I slip the sack over my legs like a skirt and two longer legs emerge out of the other side (they are the choreographer's)! With this extended dancer/choreographer body, we move through a phrase on the floor until the end.

Jasperse spoke at the beginning of rehearsals about wanting to explore authenticity and truth in performance as identified from the subjective positions of both the observer and performer. The piece, entitled Solo for Jenny: Dance of (an Undisclosed Number of) Veils, is made up of a series of sections which each explored a different aspect of this theme.

In the process of making the solo, we began by taking turns at improvising being 'authentic' or 'inauthentic' and moving between these states. In my experience of working with him, Jasperse will ask the dancer to improvise with the concept that he is researching before he forms his ideas into a movement phrase. He also improvises, so that there is an

accumulative process of building the idea together before he sets it into choreography. Jasperse told me that he was interested in exploring authenticity because of the growth of Authentic Movement as a tool in dance practice and the subsequent questions and judgements that it provokes. Following each improvisation, the mover spoke, within a given time frame and without stopping the flow of speech, about which moments felt authentic and which did not. This introduced the idea of externalising the inner critical monologue or 'inner critic' which I connected to William Burroughs's (1967) suggestion to purge the internal voice "by making it external"<sup>54</sup> (Hayles, 1999:211) (see 3.7). Jasperse used this idea of inner critique for the pirouette section in which I assess my performance by making comments such as, "my weight is too far back" or "I did not use enough force" (DVD, Menu 1, Solo for Jenny: Dance of (an Undisclosed Number of) Veils, 09:03 -12:08)<sup>55</sup>. According to Jasperse (25/04/08), the pirouette represented "not ballet as ballet, but as empirical truth".

My role throughout the solo was as both subject and object. In the wall section, I faded into the background as a 'special effect'. At other times, I was like a stage technician manipulating props or a 'showman' performing tricks. There were moments when I was the subject of the solo, talking about my pirouette or dancing a complicated phrase. It was challenging to embody these different types of presence, especially as Jasperse undermined the more obvious appearances of each section through inserting ironic counterpoints. For example, when I performed the series of magic tricks, they were intentionally designed to be badly executed and obviously fake. Yet I had to present them as if I were accomplishing an outstanding magical feat. This created an underlying sense

<sup>54</sup> In The Ticket that Exploded (1967) Burroughs's identifies the word as a 'virus' and suggests purging the internal monologue by making it external. This concept resonated with my act of journal writing throughout the choreographic encounters, which proved a useful way to 'work through' the movement experiences. I also explored Burroughs's concept in relation to Melnick's solo (see 3.8 and Appendix A: 151).

<sup>55</sup> My own critique of my pirouette is also overlaid by a man's voice (Grant McLay). He critiques me in a similar way to a sports commentator.

of confusion as to what was intentional in the work and destabilised my performance presence by reflecting my embedded layers of performance strategies back to me.

The phrase towards the end of the solo was formed from the intention to show purposeful complexity in movement (DVD, 17:00 -19:48). Jasperse told me that this section was inspired by an aesthetic that has emerged through the work of American choreographer William Forsythe<sup>56</sup> of hyper-articulation of the different body joints. Jasperse was critiquing choreography that foregrounds the dancer's display of her/his competence over communicating a theme or state of being. This produced a detailed and decorative phrase that was based on display and involved twisting and untwisting the torso and limbs around each other. It was a difficult phrase to learn, as it required many weight shifts and complicated changes in direction as well as detailed moments involving circling the ankles, wrists and head.

After the initial period of work in January, Jasperse developed many of these ideas with two other dancers, Erin Cornell and Kayvon Pourazar, both based in New York. When we began to work together again in April 2008, some of the sections of material were close to completion. There is an intrinsic methodology in Jasperse's work, of sharing material among dancing bodies so that the dancer begins from being inside the intention of the choreography but then has to re-learn and embody it from the outside. For example, I worked with Jasperse on the beginning of many of the movement ideas in the solo, which I learned in their finished form after they had been contributed to by Cornell and Pourazar. When working with Jasperse on missed/Fit in 2002 he had already developed many of the movement ideas for the piece with other dancers prior to beginning the project. This created a sense that I was a temporary host for the choreography that then continued on beyond one specific dance piece in other ways. For example, Jasperse used many of the

<sup>56</sup> Born 1949, Director of Ballet Frankfurt from 1984-2004, now director of The Forsythe Company, based in Dresden and Frankfurt Am Main.



elements from this solo in his development of PURE (2008) as mentioned above. Jasperse (25/04/08) spoke about this in the post-performance discussion:

I have a really long trajectory of thinking about an idea and I try to find ways of exploring that and so this is actually the beginning for me of looking at these ideas of lies and truth, presence and absence, fakery and creativity and how we construct belief.

Jasperse intentionally made allusions to other dance pieces or aesthetics throughout the solo. I believe this was to highlight a sense of cliché and irony in the work by placing a range of different references beside each other. Aside from the connection to William Forsythe identified above, Jasperse consciously made reference to the work of Pilobolus<sup>57</sup> in the skirt section (DVD, 20:00 – 22:20). Jasperse spoke about his approach to me as the dancer in his work. He stated that, because I work through Release Technique but come from ballet training,

It also seemed interesting in terms of this proposal to ask her to return to some kind of physical investigation that she had basically lost all interest in. For herself, engaging in it for herself, but asking her to somehow examine something about that, seemed appealing in relation to this process.

Jasperse, 25/04/08

In this way, he actively connected my life experience into the structure of the work, but this was not necessarily an empowering experience. In fact, he was using his knowledge about my previous dance experiences to agitate me out of my current way of approaching movement.

Therefore, the movement investigation in the solo required me to embody a more conventional 'dancer' role than within the other two solo processes. To manage this I employed a series of strategies that would be more akin to the working methods I utilised as a younger dancer. Coming from a different age and level of experience it was

<sup>57</sup> Pilobolus are a North American-based dance company founded by Moses Pendleton and Jonathan Wolken in 1971. The company present highly sculptural work that creates optical illusions through movement, costumes and sets (See Brown et al 1979:167).

challenging to return to an earlier approach, one of efficiency, performance and technique. Yet, interestingly this approach was still available to me to re-embody after a number of years. Being pushed back into this role through the work felt 'disempowering' as I was asked to reconnect with ways of working that I had chosen to leave behind. It is possible to pin-point certain sections which exemplified these moments, such as the pirouette section, the long twisting phrase towards the end, mentioned above (DVD, 17:00 – 19:48), and another phrase that was not included in the final piece, but that held a sustained quality of control and display<sup>58</sup>. However, the sense of disempowerment also came from being generally overwhelmed by having to manage the multiple states required throughout the solo.

As the solo was episodic, I moved through a variety of relationships with the audience. In the first section, as the wallpaper, I had a sense of drawing them into my movement. The pirouette section gave me an opportunity to connect outwardly to the audience and establish a sense of warmth and humour between us. The magic tricks also had this quality of humour and connection, although I was less comfortable in those moments as there were many details to address in executing the tricks (DVD, 12:48 – 15:35). In the complicated twisting phrase towards the end, I was focused on projecting a kind of intensity following on from the instructions that Jasperse had given me, which were to 'display' the movement. This was more like presenting a character which caused me to feel disconnected from the previous rapport established through the magic tricks section. There were many breaks between sections, including a moment when I had to change costume onstage. These 'down-times' were challenging, as I had to carry the audience with me through these obvious discontinuities. When the choreography positioned me to connect with the audience through movement or humour, I was able to establish a sense

<sup>58</sup> Some ideas that we worked on in rehearsals were omitted from the final solo because, as Jasperse stated, he was investigating an idea that would inform a number of pieces. This phrase was used later in PURE (2008).

of rapport. However, the in-between moments were pressurised and at these times the audience seeming more threatening to me.

This solo experience seemed to 'agitate' me out of comfort and stillness and this pushed me beyond a state of composure. I had to employ learned techniques rather than finding an organic relationship to the movement. The sensation was as if the movement was *happening to*, rather than *emerging from* the body. As the solo explored authenticity, it was interesting that I had to struggle internally with my sense of authentic connection to the work. Yet, this process also made me aware that the attempt to find an organic connection to movement can be too comfortable a state to allow me to adapt to new movement approaches.

The beginning 'wall' into 'floor section' (DVD, 02:00 – 04:37) started with pressing my lower back into the wall and circling my hips. The movement had to appear weighted in places that had no real weight in them. Therefore, I had to create an illusion of weight. This was even more challenging because this section occurred at my point of entry into the work at the beginning of the solo. When Jasperse demonstrated this sequence to teach it to me, he clearly held the movement form from position to position, while being sufficiently soft to yield to moments of rest. He danced this section with a specific rhythm that looked natural but actually required me to 'fake' moments of arrival and weight.

The moving identity or quality in this section is serene and controlled when observed from the outside. In the rehearsal process, we explored how I might externalise my inner monologue throughout this section and that revealed how actively I was trying to embody the many choreographic instructions. In performance, I had to hold on to these tasks mentally: "press lower back into wall, circle pelvis and turn knees and head". Unless I reaffirmed these moments through sensation, image and remembered verbal instructions, I seemed to lose focus and be propelled forward into the next movement. This

indicated how the instructions of the choreographer had become internalised and replayed throughout performance. This relates to Louis Althusser's notion of the 'interpellated subject', internalising instruction and enacting compliance (see 2.1). It also shows how these instructions served as a way of drawing me into the work.

Notes taken throughout the process with Jasperse:

*In Jasperse's work, I feel as if I'm pushing myself outwards. I'm extroverted. I have to push through inner inhibitions and shyness to present myself to the world. There is also a lot to manage, with props and timing and costume changes. It feels messy but I have to weave all the elements into the performance somehow.*

*I feel like I have to find my body in his movement, to locate myself in relation to him. It starts with watching, trying. Then really it is a leap of faith into the unknown and it's uncomfortable. I feel self-conscious about not learning the movement quickly, but then it comes to me in a non-rational way. The understanding descends and I begin to have reference points.*

*Not wanting to be 'the subject' anymore, resisting my wish to resist the work, I have a feeling of pressure, while enjoying the movement. I become the subject in the solo and people read it as 'me'. Friends in the audience said they didn't realise that I had such a 'funny side', but the magic tricks were copied from a DVD of Erin Cornell who dances with Jasperse. She created them and I just learned them<sup>59</sup>.*

In Jasperse's work, I had to make a conscious effort to connect to embodied sensation, to understand his movement through my physicality. I found myself moving at a new pace. My tendency is towards seeking resolution and integration of movement material to present an accomplished presence on stage. Instead, I had to embody ambiguity on stage and cope with the lack of comfort that this evoked. The solo shifted from one state to another. This required me to change performance presence and body texture in the work. My way of dealing with this was to project an underlying sense of centeredness in my presence as the dancer. This seemed to be an unconscious defence mechanism to enable me to maintain power on the stage as the solo performer within the

<sup>59</sup> I make reference to this in the movement treatise when I say, "magic trick created by dancer Erin Cornell, embodied (or copied from the DVD) by Jenny Roche".

challenging environment instigated by the choreographer. Thus, I was able to create continuity for myself, despite the sense of fragmentation that I felt in performance.

Following the performances, Jasperse (25/04/08) commented that there was a 'light' quality and humour in the solo that was "not necessarily typical" of how he perceives his own work and that surprised him. It seemed that the pressures of live performance drew me into a strategy of 'neutralising' the complexity of the experience beneath a calm performance surface, or as Claid (2002:33) describes it, "becoming surface illusion" (see 2.11).

### 3.8 Jodi Melnick Process

My first working experience with Jodi Melnick was as a student on the MA in Dance Performance at the University of Limerick. Melnick created an ensemble piece on our group as part of a larger work by Yoshiko Chuma entitled Ten Thousand Steps (2001) in association with Daghdha Dance Company, Limerick. Melnick has been a featured dancer with Twyla Tharp, and Irene Hultman. Currently, she performs and works with Susan Rethorst, Sara Rudner, and Vicky Schick, and has worked with NYC based freelance choreographers Tere O'Connor, Dennis O'Connor, Donna Uchizono, Yoshiko Chuma, and Yves Musard. In 2002, she began working with Trisha Brown as assistant director, and continues to create and stage work with her. In 2001 and 2008, she was honoured with 'Bessie' awards for achievements in dance.

I have been involved in a number of choreographic commissions by Melnick, including a solo, entitled Fish and Map (2003) for Rex Levitates Dance Company, performed in Temple Bar Properties 'Squared' programme for Diversions Festival, Dublin; Wanderlust Kentucky (2005) a duet for Maiden Voyage Northern Ireland, performed in the Belfast Festival at Queens and Suedehead (2008) for Rex Levitates Dance Company, performed at the Irish Museum of Modern Art. Melnick has re-worked each of the pieces

above into solo versions which she has subsequently performed. Most notably she performed Wanderlust Kentucky at Dance Theatre Workshop, New York in 2006 and presented Suedehead in February 2009 at the Kitchen in New York, alongside a new collaborative work Fanfare with visual artist Burt Barr. This latter piece incorporated movement from my commissioned solo outlined below.

August 2005, New York, during the three-day process—‘Snap shot’

*We have been working on movement and the material is familiar. I’m overwhelmed—whether it’s a combination of the intensity of the summer and the city or just relevant to this process, I don’t know— feel shaken. I feel static and blocked today. She was in the throes of a lot of movement when I came into the studio. It all came at me in a clump.*

I enter the space at the upstage right corner to begin a slow and steady movement sequence that shows different impulses arising from various body parts. I settle into a muscular, exaggerated ‘macho’ walk downstage to confront the audience to the soundtrack of the film The Good, the Bad and the Ugly (1966)<sup>60</sup>. This form dissolves momentarily into a fluid phrase and then I return to movement that scans from left to right across the space. There is a sense of restraint throughout, a lifted quality in my movement. Towards the end of the solo, I move into a detailed fast phrase that is ‘marked’ and complex. This phrase ends with me retreating upstage as I gently wave goodbye. Finally, I dance a little coda in another downstage space which is framed by a single standing lamp; it is private and dreamy. The lyrics to a song accompany my repetitive arm swing: “I don’t know why, I keep on dreaming of you”<sup>61</sup>. Fade out.

The solo piece by Melnick is entitled Business of the Bloom. Melnick (25/04/08) spoke about her approach to making the work:

<sup>60</sup> Directed by Sergio Leone, the soundtrack was composed by Ennio Morricone.

<sup>61</sup> The song was “Dreaming of You” by composer Joel Mellin, performed by Miss Mary. Published by Stereorrific Recordings (USA).

I was really concerned...that Jenny had an experience, that maybe I've had before as a performer, [that] every movement, every word, every step (even though it's formed and there's a structure and set material) is happening to the body for the first time.

Melnick enters the creative process with many ideas, images and stimuli, rather than with a concept to be explored. These images seem to be located within her physicality as movement impulses. When I first started working with Melnick, I found her choreographic process unusual, as she seemed to configure the movement through dancing. I mention this because many choreographers with whom I have worked verbally articulate the type of movement that they are looking for and there is a clear intellectualising process that precedes the creation of the choreography. Jasperse, for example, sought particular types of movement to elucidate the ideas he was presenting in the solo. Melnick worked by moving and then editing in movement, rather than projecting choreography onto the body of the dancer. She tended to demonstrate the whole movement in motion and this was usually too complex to embody initially. Through suspending the need to execute the material correctly but rather tracing and following her movements, the movement phrases eventually settled and finer details could then be added.

The immediacy of the interaction and the lack of an objectively posited conceptual motivation were challenging. This is because Melnick did not create a verbal explanation through which to frame the movement experiences, which made it difficult at times to orientate myself in the process. Our interaction was intimate and involving. Indeed, the working atmosphere in the studio often felt 'trance-like' and it was difficult to mentally recall the movement outside the studio process. I spoke about this experience in the movement treatise (DVD, Menu 2, Hauntings and Tracings, 14:00):

*I trace the movement behind her; trance-like I mimic and respond.*

This working state invites an appraisal of the relationship between language and the body. As Foucault (1977:148) articulates, the body is “traced by language and dissolved by ideas”. I read this as a statement that ideas articulated through language dissolve the body’s unconscious expression. In the movement treatise, I said, “my speaking destroys the world”, to indicate that when I speak, my body’s expressivity seems to be muted. By moving underneath the rational configuring mind into the unconscious terrain of the body’s non-verbal communication in Melnick’s process, I seemed to be able to bypass mental inhibitors and to open up new expressive movement possibilities.

*Fluid boundaries- unstable ground...nothing to anchor ‘self’. Sense of my own femininity, she has a catalysing effect on my movement. We are moving alongside each other- artisanal relationship. I have always been interested in her relationship with Sara Rudner. It was a dancing exchange that was not focused on producing work [see 2.6]. Over the years, I have had this experience with Melnick.*

Melnick’s methodology engendered a particular type of learning process. The movement seemed to settle over time despite no conscious attempt on my part to ‘learn it’. I wrote about how, after creating in this way:

*Something of the shape remains in my body.*

I experienced this as a build-up of layers of information that ultimately became embedded as movement patterns. However, these movement patterns remained dynamic and were still open to change rather than becoming fixed movements. This has something to do with the process of building up information about the movement through experiencing it, rather than creating a phrase of definite positions for the body to travel through. Movements did not appear individual and separate from each other but instead seemed to be part of a wider ‘gestalt’.

*The layers of the movement build up like sediment without becoming solid.*



A connection to Sara Rudner's approach is evident in Melnick's methodology and the passage below helps to understand how this learning approach works. Rudner spoke about learning movement by dancing alongside the choreographer.

I remember Twyla [Tharp] through those periods when she would improvise in front of a TV camera.... And she would say, 'ok learn this movement'...I could sort of do it, but it drove me crazy. As soon as she started dancing again and I could stand behind her and move with her, then I could get it, I would know what it was. So, Jodi [Melnick] is like that.

Dancing Melnick's solo in performance, I felt that my consciousness was floating on the surface. My body felt light and sensitive, prone to interference or distraction. I was in a fluid state of being, responding to minute details and shifts in my bodily state. I watched each moment unfold. This was the quality that Melnick (25/04/08) sought in the work, as if the movement was "happening to the body for the first time". This state of being appears to be similar to that of Anna Halprin, which is described by Sally Banes (1993:11) as a "dance state,' in which the body is focused and receptive to impulses" (see 2.2). Halprin's work largely influenced developments in postmodern dance in New York and Melnick's lineage as a dancer comes from this genre of contemporary dance through dancing with choreographers such as Rudner and Trisha Brown (1936—).

The marking phrase (DVD, Menu 1, Business of the Bloom 07:15 - 09:00) towards the end of the solo came from our first rehearsal session together in New York in 2006/2007. Part of this section was taken from an improvisation that Melnick asked me to do while she recorded it on camera. She then re-embodied this movement and incorporated it into a longer phrase, which she formed. The idea was that the phrase would maintain a light quality as if 'marked' (not performed fully) while keeping the sense of detail. The phrase focused on a quality of 'tracing' movement ideas while moving as if preoccupied with other thoughts. Melnick changed this phrase many times before it settled

into this form. It is as if it remains as an impression, rather than fixed in any one place. In this section, I often felt that I was dancing on the 'edge'. I experienced this as moving faster, and with more complexity, than I could consciously track with my awareness, by literally 'being ahead of myself'. The material was very detailed but Melnick did not want me to achieve it in a polished way or to make it look too smooth.

There were a number of tasks required for this section, which were to move quickly, maintain looseness in the legs and hold the image of being mentally distracted. It was difficult to find initially the correct quality for this section, which engendered a balancing process between the mental configuring of the movement and letting the muscle memory unfold. If pushed too much in either direction, the movement lost clarity. The moving identity in this section displays lightness and complexity. There are further changes of direction and a gentle bounce inserted into the phrase when it is repeated. The movement is felt lightly throughout the 'soft tissue' such as the muscles and fascia and maintains a balance between being directed and easily fluid. It is known, yet not completely 'fixed'.

Notes taken throughout the process with Melnick:

*Just following, shadowing her movements and not really speaking together, but I am thinking all the time in this rehearsal. My mind is constantly throwing thoughts at me. It's this strange feeling of being alone while being totally together.*

*Now I feel as if I am just unravelling, not in an uncomfortable way, but dissolving away from life into something else—a chaos and obsessive nature in my personality, the unconscious—the other. I feel a bit 'unhooked'. Is this the experience of freeing myself from everyday cultural norms 'the habitus'? Or whatever identity enactment stabilises my sense of self at the moment. I feel 'ungrounded'.*

*Words are comforting, even if they don't really relate to what is happening. Words can steady the process, even though they can interfere with the formation of what is really unfolding. Melnick said that if she could explain verbally what the piece was about, she wouldn't have to make it.*

My performance presence was less outwardly focused in this particular solo than those of Jasperse and Roche. I was drawn back into body sensations by performing a type of

interiority, which could also be lost at times under the pressures of the live performance. As when the chain falls off a bicycle, I could momentarily lose my connection into this unfolding movement process. These were the moments when I became distracted internally or externally. I was aware of bringing the audience with me through the choreography by projecting a heightened presence that reflected this inner attentiveness.

This working experience highlighted how movement becomes 'unfixed' through the dancing process and how this seemed to have deep reverberations through self-stabilising processes, such as the internal monologue which according to Buddhist teaching re-enforces a sense of self-hood (Hayles, 1999). N. Katherine Hayles (1999) highlights this phenomenon through referencing the work of William Burroughs (see 3.7). She states that "woven into this monologue are the fictions that society wants its members to believe; the monologue enacts self-discipline as well as self-creation" (Hayles, 1999: 211). Hayles is referring to William Burroughs' (1967:49) poignant exploration of the internal monologue:

The word is now a virus...The word may once have been a healthy neural cell. It is now a parasitic organism that invades and damages the central nervous system. Modern man has lost the option of silence. Try halting your sub-vocal speech. Try to achieve even ten seconds of inner silence. You will encounter a resisting organism that *forces you to talk*.<sup>62</sup>

The work with Melnick required me to embody a fluid state of being, to be a body in constant motion. Her working method was de-stabilising in ways other than Jasperse and Roche's. It seemed that in order to learn the material, I had to surrender my dancing strategies of analysing movement and to trust the body's ability to make unconscious connections. The rehearsals were not all conducted in silence but finding the 'logic' of the movement happened in non-verbal states. Once the material was found, Melnick then

<sup>62</sup> I made reference to this quote during the movement treatise in relation to Melnick's work. This is because we often had long periods without talking in her rehearsals during which I was very aware of the interruptive nature of my internal monologue. By bringing to awareness this monologue, I could notice if I was particularly unsettled or uncomfortable during the process.

refined the movement through making anatomical or image-based statements such as “think of your left little finger nail arching back towards your right eyebrow” or “imagine in this section that you have swallowed a rock”.

Many of Melnick’s dynamics or rhythmical tendencies seem integrated in my movement approach now and I notice that I tend to draw finer lines in movement. I am also more conscious of how movement is orientated both spatially (in relation to my body and my body in space) and in direction (when travelling through space). Many of these sensations of difference are very subtle and emerge through seemingly unconscious processes from my body—in—flux.

### 3.9 Liz Roche Process

Roche is my sister and we began collaborating as choreographer and dancer in 1999 when we co-founded Rex Levitates Dance Company. We both directed the company together until 2007.

Roche was awarded the Bonnie Bird Choreographic Award 2001 (UK) and the Peter Darrell Award 2000 (UK) and has choreographed for Scottish Dance Theatre, CoisCéim, Dance Theatre of Ireland, Maiden Voyage and CCNC (Caen) France. She has choreographed nine works to date for Rex Levitates Dance Company, performing in festivals in Ireland and Europe. Roche created a piece for The National Ballet of China in collaboration with Rex Levitates, which was performed in the Meet in Beijing Festival in May 2004. As well as working extensively as a dancer in Ireland, she has worked with Compagnie La Camionetta (France), Christine Gaigg (Austria) and John Jasperse (NY).

In 2008, I performed in her work at the Irish Cultural Festival in Beijing and the piece from Solo<sup>3</sup> in DancEUnion at the Purcell Room, South Bank Centre, London; the Capital Nights Festival in Liverpool and the Massachusetts International Festival of Arts, US.

April 2008, Dublin, during rehearsals for the solo—‘Snap shot’

*I feel underlying panic; there is no time to get this movement. We talk throughout the rehearsal while moving, about anything and everything. Talking like this clears the blocks. Our bodies have softened throughout the session. This rehearsal was about finding our common movement dynamic.*

I appear at the back of the stage in the centre, with my back to the audience, alone under a strong overhead light. I am wearing a heavy black jacket—a hidden and secretive figure. There are glimpses of my fingers in the light as they move over my back or the side of my torso. I step backwards into a square of light and begin a swinging movement that repeats and develops into a phrase through accumulation. The sounds of the steps and little murmurs of “ok” and “I don’t remember” sound louder than they should for one singular person<sup>63</sup>. My performance evokes an atmosphere of waiting and responsiveness.

There is something reflective in the darkness to my right side and then, as I move downstage, the silhouette of another body is revealed to my left. There are three bodies dancing on stage, one either side of me in the darkness. Although they are not fully lit, the three of us can be seen moving in unison. We walk upstage and mime shooting ourselves in the left side of the torso and stumble through the next phrase, still moving together.

Facing upstage, we stop to scratch our heads at the same time and then drop to the floor. Taking off our jackets makes the other two dancers more visible and as we move upstage into sculpted positions the three forms can be seen more clearly. Our last trajectory brings us forward and down to the ground until a last look at the audience and a final utterance of “ok” marks the end.

<sup>63</sup> These moments of speaking were part of the choreography.

This piece is entitled Shared Material on Dying and is danced by Roche, Katherine O'Malley<sup>64</sup> and me. We dance the material in unison together but I am in the centre of the stage and the only dancer who is fully lit. Therefore, it is a solo embodied by three dancers.

Roche began working on this solo through creating a movement phrase that was then broken down into shorter sections. The phrase consisted of movements that kinesthetically made 'sense' to her. She told me that during the process of teaching the material, she began to unconsciously assign meaning to the movement. As certain movements began to look like responses to physical pain, she subsequently built a narrative based on the idea of a 'gunshot' that is mimed two-thirds into the piece. This had the effect of introducing a narrative through-line into what had been an abstract movement study. Thus, the gunshot retrospectively made sense of the previous movements as they were repeated in a new way, to represent checking our hands for blood or holding the sides of our bodies in pain.

Roche (25/04/08) spoke in the post-performance discussion about how the idea for the solo emerged for her:

I was interested in having an experience, with Jenny and Katherine, so that there was a sense that she was doing a solo but her timing relied on us and we were helping her or getting in her way. I just liked the idea that we could be some support to her through it...it's a solo, there are just three of us doing it and I see it that way.

Roche sometimes worked separately on developing the material with O'Malley, which she would then teach to me during our sessions. However, it seemed that the shape of the dance could only be mapped out in these sessions with the two of them. I wrote in my journal that she wanted me to be *"an integral part of the unfolding work, rather than just a dancer learning the movement"*. Perhaps this is what I sensed when I wrote:

<sup>64</sup> Katherine O'Malley trained at the Perm State Ballet School, Russia and London Contemporary Dance School, UK. She has worked with Rex Levitates Dance Company since 1999 and independently for a number of choreographers in Ireland and abroad.

*She can only feel which movements make sense when we three are dancing together.*

The pressure in working on this piece was significant because although we endeavoured to dance together in exact unison, this task could never be perfectly achieved. The piece presented the underlying futility of this endeavour and evoked a sense of human limitation. The task of dancing in silence, in unison, for twenty minutes demanded intense concentration and focus. O'Malley and Roche were in semi-darkness and it was difficult to see them. For example, there were moments when I had to visualise where their arms would be or when they were about to step and this engendered a heightened sensorial experience.

In performance, I had sufficient cues to locate the others in space at times and then moments when I moved 'off-grid' into a type of sensory blackout until I could see or hear them again. Deane Juhan (1987:187) after Austrian psychoanalyst Paul Schilder (1886-1940), writes, "[body] perception is formed on the basis of movement". In a motionless position without stimuli, the body image loses its definition and orientation. Yet, as soon as the body moves again causing "various degrees of friction, stretching, and impact ... the sharp lines of ... [the] body's physical boundaries ... leap back into focus" (Juhan, 1987: 187). I had to extend this mapping process further out into the space beyond my own body in order to 'locate' the other two. This gave me a heightened sense of anxiety when I could no longer perceive them with my senses and a greater sense of comfort when I was able to track their movements. This exaggerated my own inner configuring process, producing powerful emotional states, despite the often calm and steady appearance of the movement.

The particular circumstances created by the performance environment gave an experience of being a 'split subject', of being both the mover and the observer of the

movement, waiting to move and then finding oneself in movement. Reynolds (2007:11) writes that the “embodied self can be experienced as ‘other’ to the conscious mind”:

Movement may be performed by a split subject, and may be experienced, by both dancer and spectator, as originating in the body or body part, rather than as the fulfilment of intentions fully known to the agent.

This piece created gaps between the intention to move, moving and observing the movement, which required us to employ ‘mindfulness’, identified by Varela et al (1993) (see 2.3) as a self-reflective state that cultivates responsiveness and awareness. In performance, I had to stay ‘awake’ in order to maintain focus and continuity throughout the different modes of action and attention needed. Therefore, ‘mindfulness’ was woven into the fabric of the movement and became intrinsic to the correct execution of the piece.

In the gunshot section (DVD, Menu 1, Shared Material on Dying, 11:10 –14:02) mentioned above, there is a faster and more weighted sense of falling from one movement to the next, to convey the dramatic nature of the moment. The challenges in this section lie in the tension between staying in unison with the other dancers while moving at a fast pace, which resulted from complicated weight shifts and impulses. The movement had the tendency to almost overtake the body’s ability to execute it, as it fell from moment to moment in a state of ‘controlled abandon’. This state still required responsiveness to the others, between waiting and pre-empting the movement.

The feeling of this section was akin to the impulse before a building ‘caves in’. Although there was a dramatic narrative moving through this section, I was not pulled into the drama of the moment. This was because the piece was held by three bodies, which removed it from a singular to a multiple, a personal to a shared, experience. This choreographic structure was sufficient to abstract the moments that might normally indicate the subjective expression of the individual dancer. Moments such as scratching the back of the head or brushing something off the sole of the foot, were both felt as personal



expressions and as wider abstracted actions. This is an effect that De Keersmaecker used in Rosas Danst Rosas (1983) (see 2.10).

The only way to rehearse this work was to 'dance it' because it was so firmly centred in a shared moving identity<sup>65</sup>. Therefore, rehearsals and run-throughs also required performance presence. As I was the only dancer lit onstage, it felt as if I was under a microscope during the performance. This sense of scrutiny, despite the underlying shared experience, opened a dimension of 'starkness'. In performance, the audience seemed like the external projection of my internal observing eye. I did not feel very connected to them because my focus was split through trying to sense the other two dancers. There was a dark narrative running through the piece, which was also strengthened by the heavy clothing and partially-lit stage. However, my focus was drawn into perceiving the other two and unfolding the detail of the movement, rather than into this narrative. Roche asked us to exaggerate some of the moments of strain in the gunshot section in order to add to the dramatic quality and I consciously directed this expression outwards to the audience. The other two dancers did not feel like separate individuals whom I could relate to as such. Rather, we were like parallel projections of the same being, separated in space<sup>66</sup>.

The shared nature of the piece did not allow me to fully possess it as my own solo expression. The performance quality happened as a result of my activity, rather than employing a supplementary performance 'self'. Yet, due to the nature of the piece, I was required to present 'composure' despite the many levels of emotional turmoil and anxiety that I felt in attempting to connect with the other two. I experienced this as a kind of duality, 'a neutralisation' of complexity beneath a calm surface.

<sup>65</sup> In the movement treatise, Roche joined me onstage to dance an extract of the piece. This was important because the imperative to keep together by connecting outwardly to another moving body was an essential part of the movement quality of the choreography.

<sup>66</sup> The reviews of Solo<sup>3</sup> give an impression of Shared Material on Dying as viewed from the outside (see Appendix D: 156).

### Notes taken throughout the process with Roche

*Connection, history, part of a whole—I don't experience a sense of individuality. This work is not about expressing a 'self'. In this way, the solo represents the working process with Roche. I am somehow aligning to a shape or form that feels as if it's already in existence, part of a bigger picture.*

*I am not able to move without the others. The movement is the information; I just have to embody it. Not singular, but multiple. Consciousness is spread around the room. A strange feeling of being separate and taking the movement on, and at the same time being part of a bigger whole. Each time I go to re-embody the trio/solo I am acutely aware of my body being unhooked from the 'grids' of the work and that I need to re-find the co-ordinates of our three bodies moving together in space.*

*My body feels most like its everyday self in Roche's work. Despite the specificity and complexity of the movement, I always get to a place of ease or being-ness. It is known. Her body then becomes a vehicle for me to expand my awareness of my body. She is a catalyst that offers a deeper connection to my embodied self.*

By working on this piece, I shared a moving identity with O'Malley and Roche. The process of finding a common movement vocabulary that was still fluid and dynamic required that I broke through many habitual movement patterns. The way that I experienced this most strongly was in rhythm and timing. This work utilised an 'artisanal' process of choreographer and dancer dancing together which is articulated through Gardner (2007) and Rudner (see 2.6) and it was also akin to Melnick's process of learning through dancing. This piece also resonated with the structures of Authentic Movement, whereby the dancer is authentically present to the movement as it is happening. The shifts that occurred in my way of moving, through dancing this piece, were very subtle and seemed to occur at a deep level of body-mind configuring. Despite the familiarity of this working environment and the long trajectory of working together, the choreography was still new to me and took time to embody fully.

This working process highlighted to me the experience of 'corporeal mapping' with which the dancer is engaged, prior to and during performance. I explore this idea in detail

later in this chapter (see 3.12) but to summarise, I see this as a way of building and then adhering to a set of instructions which allows the dancer to materialise the choreographic piece while also negotiating the unpredictable environment of a live performance. So, it is a dynamic activity that involves assessing the current experiential terrain, as Roses-Thema (2007:3) writes, through mapping “internal milieu” while adhering to the choreographed score.

I performed this piece in four subsequent settings and the cast changed twice to incorporate a different dancer<sup>67</sup>. This required us to re-calibrate our shared moving identity each time. In the rehearsals for a performance at the Purcell Room in London, I remember working on a movement that was repeated many times throughout the piece. It began by moving the weight into the right hip, stepping on the left leg and then stepping forward onto the turned out right leg on a diagonal. At the same time, I *swooped* the right arm down and then *snaked* it upward until it stopped in a fist (DVD, 03:45). I tried a number of times to find the correct placing of the arm and body, the right timing and swooping action and the correct placing of emphasis in the phrase. Although this may seem to be a minor moment, I experienced this rehearsal as a kind of ‘breaking through’ my embedded patterns to find the correct detail. After I got this movement ‘right’, it anchored me firmly in the work each time I danced the piece, so that the rest of the piece unfolded with less conscious effort. It was akin to ‘tuning’ my embodied self into the movement.

### 3.10 Performance Traces—Solo Edges

Moving from one process to the next in rehearsal required a clear change in attention and body attitude. When rehearsing with Jasperse, on Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> April, (the day before the performance) it was clear that his movement had clear points of ‘arrival’. It had a pro-active

<sup>67</sup> Cliodhna Hoey performed instead of O'Malley in the Purcell Room at the South Bank Centre, London and instead of Roche in Holyoke, Massachusetts.

and extroverted quality. Having clarified the movement in this session, it was tempting to fully concentrate on this material and its specific detail, to *rest* in this one place.

The rehearsal with Melnick, which followed, interrupted this temporary stability. There was a heightened definition in my muscularity that lingered as a residue from Jasperse's material. This residue made it difficult to express the subtlety of Melnick's movement. The process of building up the choreographic schema in Melnick's solo caused the embedded choreography to 'rise up out of the body' in an almost trance-like fashion.

This process of cultivating receptivity in Melnick's work became more apparent when making the transition into rehearsals for Roche's piece. Moving from the internal quality of Melnick's work, to incorporating the embodied presences of the two other dancers into my bodily schema in Roche's piece, required me to find common ground quickly and to jettison any lingering preoccupations from the previous two processes.

Despite the sense of fragmentation in rehearsals, it was easier to create a sense of continuity throughout the performances of Solo<sup>3</sup>. The entire programme became a complete 'gestalt' so that the separation between each piece was less distinct. The sense of destabilisation of habitual movement which seems central to learning new movement throughout rehearsals was no longer acutely present in performance and so the performance as a three—solo—evening became solidified into a sixty-minute piece. Thus, the running order of the solos created a specific movement pathway for me to traverse.

Holding each of the three choreographies embodied as separate schemas, yet concurrently interlinked within one programme was particularly challenging. One aspect that appeared to make it more possible was the 'live' presence of the three choreographers, back-stage, in the audience or on-stage. This seemed to make it easier to tune into the specific textures in each work and to embody their subtle differences. Indeed, when I began to re-embody the works in preparation for the movement treatise without all

the choreographers present, it took some time to find the distinctive qualities of each work again<sup>68</sup>.

The experience of concurrently embodying three different choreographic schemas seemed to destabilise inner structures of identity and self-hood that had previously felt 'solid'. Even the architecture of my skeleton seemed to be affected:

*After the performances, I stopped 'dead'. I stilled my dancing body out of a perceived need to reclaim it again. I hardly moved or explored my physicality beyond treatments for my back, which felt quite strained afterwards. The osteopath who worked on me said that the right side of my body was 'locked', from my neck down through the spine to my pelvis. The left psoas muscle was constricting my left kidney and when he released it, I felt complete exhaustion for a number of weeks. This gave me a sense of the tension I had been holding physically and perhaps the conflict of having to surrender my embodied self to these various processes.*

The positive aspect carried forward from the experience was the sense of having expanded my abilities in managing movement complexity. This is evident through an experience of having formed new movement co-ordinations. This phenomenon of building movement knowledge through dancing experience indicates that the moving identity is an accumulation of incorporated movement. Like a palimpsest, it holds traces of previous choreography. As shown through Jasperse's solo, I was capable of re-embodying traces from a previous dancing self that was linked to my ballet training from many years earlier.

### 3.11 The Movement Treatise/ Many Bodies in One Body

*I feel my body's materiality most strongly when it is between defined places, when it is in process towards some movement destination. I feel its flesh—its reality.*

<sup>68</sup> I spoke about this in the movement treatise: "the bodies of the choreographers, their physical presences, helped to situate me in each work. They were always around, on-stage and off. They each were points of reference—a container—storage spaces, anchors, markers" (see Appendix A: 151).

In the movement treatise, I danced extracts from each of the solos within one continuous performative state. This was to demonstrate how each solo required me to move in a different way and to illustrate my process of negotiating these changing environments. The transitions between choreographic processes were more challenging in the movement treatise, as I only 'rested' in each process for a short period of time. The intention behind this section was to highlight the contrasts between the solos and to indicate the inherent complexity of the dancer's process.

The movement treatise also incorporated text from my journal that had emerged from working with each of the choreographers. The act of speaking while dancing within this context brought me out of the position of the dancer "under-erasure" (Melrose, 2005:175) (see 2.8). Thus, I displayed my postpositivist research position as both the one who materialises the choreographic text and the one who can reflect upon and represent the interiority of this experience outwards to the world. At the beginning of the solo, I said: "identity is anchored through movement. The dancer, *that's me*, possesses a moving identity that is both continuous and altering from one choreographic process to the next". By asserting my presence through saying, "that's me", I indicated that the dancer can speak for her/himself, even from within the choreographic text.

The purpose of the movement treatise was to demonstrate that the dancer builds a corporeal portfolio of embedded movement in embodied traces. The extracts of each solo showed moments from my 'corporeal portfolio' and also indicated that the bodily attitude and approach required for each of the choreographic pieces was different. With this aspect of the treatise, I endeavoured to show how contrasting movement approaches can co-exist as traces in the dancer's moving identity.

I further amalgamated the three solos and Butcher's process into one final phrase (DVD, Menu 2, Hauntings and Tracings, 22:20 – 27:00). This phrase began with raising

my right shoulder and inverting my right arm and then untwisting the arm through *fanning* the fingers backwards. This came from Jasperse's solo and so I said, "John". Then I *swooped* and *snaked* the same arm into a movement from Roche's solo while saying "Liz" (see 3.9). Then I continued through a sequence of different movements, which were each taken from the solo encounters, naming the choreographer that had originated the movement each time.

When I composed this sequence, I imagined the totality of the movement experiences from the research *flooding* my embodied self. I allowed the movement traces to create their own synergies and rhythmical correlations. Working on this sequence demonstrated how the previously embodied movement became integrated into my moving present through a process of accumulation. It alluded to the way in which dancers' moving identities are composites of past movement experiences from various interactions with choreographers and other dancers. As interviewee Rebecca Hilton (11/07/08) said, "It is the way we mark and scar and shape each other" (see 1.8). This movement phrase also indicated that movement experiences settle into moving identities, leading to an amalgamation of influences that often create an idiosyncratic style when dancers themselves begin to choreograph. Thus, the movement treatise points to a shared embodied archive that is carried forward through transmission from dancing body to dancing body (see 1.1)<sup>69</sup>.

In this phrase at the end of the movement treatise, there were transitions that arose from the requirement to draw movements from different sources together into sequence. For these transition movements, in which I sutured these disparate 'chunks' of information together, I said "Jenny", to indicate that I was the one who chose how to link the movements. In the final phrase, which was made up solely of these small transitions, I

<sup>69</sup> As mentioned in the introduction, Juliette Mapp incorporated this idea into her dance piece to show the other dancing bodies that had helped to form her as a dancer (see ix).

said my name for each movement (DVD, 27:35 – 28:03). This was to give a sense of how I filled in the spaces between moments in each of the solos, thus demonstrating Rebecca Hilton's (1993:73) description of making "a lot of decisions" as a dancer in Stephen Petronio's work (see 2.14). In this section, I indicated my urge to build a continuity of self despite the fracturing effect of the different working processes.

### 3.12 Corporeal Matrices

As links in a chain of reflex, I cannot be fixed in absolute terms, I can only present myself as variable, as event within the dynamic of place.

Helen Chadwick, 1989:109

Visual artist Helen Chadwick's description of her embodied self, as an 'event within the dynamic of place', seems to resonate with the process of 'becoming' inherent to the contemporary dancer's activity. The instantiated nature of embodiment locates human experience into a specific form that, despite being fluid and mutable, has real material boundaries and limitations (see Hayles 2.15 and Braidotti 1.16). As researcher/participant, I moved my embodied form through the research environment to encounter and be agitated by the difference offered through these choreographers' unique 'enfleshed complexity' (Braidotti, 2000:158).

Chadwick states, "Interactions keep making me happen". This has obvious resonance for the activities of independent dancers as they move from one choreographic process to the next. Potentially, they can be (re)-formed and (re)-constituted through each new choreographic interaction. Dancer Catherine Bennett (07/11/08) describes how the process of becoming is "a translation process" wherein the dancer must "mediate between who you're working for, who the choreographer is and what they want stylistically". She states,



Sometime my body does that naturally and sometimes I have to leave the rehearsal room, process it in my head and work out how I can understand this for myself.

Bennett, 07/11/08

On the other hand, dancer Rebecca Hilton (11/07/08) has less of a sense of changing at a deep level between processes, but seems to have an underlying connection to a continuum of self-hood throughout, whereby the choreographer's influence is felt as supplementary.

Rather than this transformative experience, it's always me. But it's me doing John's [Jasperse] work or me doing Stephen's [Petronio] choreography.

Arguably, in order to register difference, there must be something to contrast it against. Both Hilton and Bennett articulate a strong sense of self that forms a backdrop against which they can negotiate 'otherness'.

The dancer's reconstitution through the choreographic process may not always be superficially apparent to an outside (or inside) eye and lasting changes to the moving identity may take many years to fully register. Indeed, dancers often appear similar from one choreographic process to the next. The more temporary changes, which occur for dancers between choreographic works, may be instigated by the way in which they are directed by the choreographer to focus their attention. These are the instructions that have become internalised, as Lepecki (2006) posits in relation to Althusser's (1994: 135-136) notion of interpellation, whereby subjects enact subjectification "all by themselves" (see 2.1). Interviewee Phillip Connaughton (15/10/08) spoke about how these differences between pieces are materialised:

It's all the mental processing that you're doing throughout the rehearsal process...that allows you to work with your body in a different way to the last piece.

The dancer builds a map of meaning, sensation and motor feedback that organises the body in a different way. Connaughton (15/11/08) described how he forms this map through

making “a mental pattern of the piece in my head, an emotional, mental, energetic pattern that is probably what changes the physicality or what changes the audience’s perception of what I’m doing”. This pattern reaches back into deep physiological structures that to some degree alter experience, body texture and sensation. The body—in—flux is given over to a specific choreographic process. The following passage from my journal opens out a way of conceptualising the dancer’s process of forming a type of ‘corporeal map’.

*I see the dance works as webs or matrices, projected somewhere in space or perhaps internally in my body mind. Maps formed, holding information, showing alignments and dynamics in a particular and specific way. I contain them and they contain me as we interweave<sup>70</sup>.*

As matrices these networks are both internally and externally linked. In Roses-Thema’s (2007) PhD research she captured moments from the performance experience of dancers. By asking the dancers to explain what they perceived in these particular moments, she began to build a sense of the instructions that they adhere to. This is an example of the feedback she received:

I set my move up. I just exhale as I take my pli   (bend of the knee) and preparation in fourth position just before the turn, and I just go calmly into it without thinking I’m going to have to push this one...I say calm, calm, calm, and turn. That’s what I say in my head.

Dancer ‘Scott’ in Roses-Thema, 2007: 78

I see these layers of instructions, some conscious and some unconscious, as the ‘corporeal map’ that is unfolding throughout the performance. There are vast amounts of information passing through the human nervous system at all times. Additionally, there is the complexity of what the dancer may be trying to physically achieve at any given time in the dance. Most of the instructions that shape the ‘corporeal map’ would have to be

<sup>70</sup> I play a recording of me reciting this passage in the movement treatise (DVD, Menu 2, Hauntings and Tracings, 20:55 – 21:20).

unconsciously embedded long before the performance to allow the dancer to deal with the extra challenges of live performing within a performance space that may include a wide degree of variable elements including audience, lights, costume and stage design. This is made evident through Roses- Thema (2007:3) description of the variable nature of dance performance:

Every performance for the dancer is different...because for the dancer, the divisions between their experience of the performance, the choreographer's movement text, the reaction of the audience are fluid and dynamic...changes, reactions, and relationships are born and dissolve...during an actual live performance.

Being pulled out of engagement with each solo process by the next solo, or even by the requirement to manage practical elements of production and research, gave me a clear indication of the depth of engagement I had with each piece. The degree of absorption in configuring the corporeal map and 'processing' the many detailed layers of movement information could even be characterised as a type of psychic 'possession'.

Through the formation of this corporeal map or matrix, which is also interactive, because it is open to influences within a live performance, each solo directed me to inhabit a different type of embodied self or moving identity. This identity permeated my physicality, to create an embodied experience that altered my projection of myself into the world. Choreographic work could be conceptualised as a temporary resting place or landing site for a specific embodied identity that both absorbs the dancer fully and gives a sense of stability for a period of time, albeit finite. Therefore, each choreographic schema is potentially a different experiential universe, giving different sensations, types of feedback and range of emotional and psychological states.

## *Conclusions*

1. In order to begin to address the questions in this research I had to construct a 'ground' from which to speak. This is because there is virtually no analysis of the choreographic process by practicing contemporary dancers written from the 'first person' position. My postpositivist research perspective, which acknowledges the multiplicity inherent in human subjectivity, invited the use of a multiple range of theoretical tools. Therefore, I have drawn together an eclectic combination of critical perspectives including recent dance studies, somatic practices and postmodern philosophy to build up a model of understanding. For this study, I have found the postmodern philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1987) highly useful in conceptualising the independent contemporary dancer. Their notion of 'de-stratification' denotes the 'disorganisation' of the dancer's provisional sense of stability in order to re-organise around a new choreographic schema (see 1.17).
2. Through my literature review, I have noted that the independent contemporary dancer has evolved out of the dissolution of distinct canonical dance styles. This shift from choreographers drawing from a few canonical styles within modernist approaches to choreography to the proliferation of choreographic signatures, each with their own somatic language, occurred throughout the latter half of the twentieth century, from the Judson Dance Theatre (1960s) onwards. This progression from distinct choreographic styles into individualistic choreographic signatures has changed the 'labour' of the dancer from perfecting one technique to embodying a series of different choreographic incorporations over time. In researching the dancer's process, I have named the accumulative traces of these incorporations the 'moving identity'. This metaphorical term has allowed me to

map an emerging paradigm shift in the dancer's activity within dance-making processes.

3. I have observed that the dancer's 'moving identity' is the result of the accumulation of choreographic movement incorporations and training influences. It also incorporates the orientation of the dancer as a gendered, socially and culturally located subject. Like a 'palimpsest', the moving identity holds traces of past embodiments that are also available to the dancer to be re-embodied again. This moving identity creates a sense of consistency in how the dancer moves and could be regarded as the movement signature that the dancer forms throughout a career path. Through explorations into the body image, Bourdieu's concept of the habitus and the operation of movement engrams as described by Deane Juhan (1987), I have outlined the plasticity of the human nervous system. The dancer demonstrates an intensified ability to repeatedly incorporate and integrate new motor skills that are imprinted on the sensory cortex of the brain. In the way that new motor skills impact on existing engrams, choreographic engrams alter the dancer's moving identity over time.
4. As the dancer is not a *tabula rasa*, but carries the traces of past embodiments, I have concluded that she/he cannot be considered to be a neutral 'instrument' or 'tool' within the choreographic process. Dance writers such as Geraldine Morris (2003), Susan Melrose (2005) and Ramsay Burt (2004) have already identified that individual dancers make an impact on both the development of an individual choreographic work and the development of a choreographer's style (see 1.8). However, the degree to which the dancer's moving identity and creative engagement impacts on the formation of the choreographic work has not been explored in detail through dance studies. This research has uncovered that

although in professional circles it is often understood that the dancer/choreographer relationship is creatively collaborative, this understanding is not reflected in the dance marketplace where choreographers are generally cited as the signature artists of the dance work. Nor is it an established view within dance studies where choreography is often critiqued as an *oeuvre* that stands apart from the materiality of its production by dancing bodies (see 1.1).

5. This research has repositioned the dancer (me) as narrator of my creative process. Through making this shift in perspective and embodying the dual role of dancer/researcher I have been able to engage with many of the fundamental aspects of dance as an embodied practice, which are normally unavailable to academic research. This is because the archive can engage more readily with language and writing than embodied experience and dancers have not been enabled to engage with critical discourse from within their creative process (see 1.1). Normally, once the choreography is created and performed, it is archived through video recording, notation or reviews. The dancer is no longer called upon to represent the dance piece within the archive and thus her/his live presence and experiential perspective disappears. This research invites the possibility for dancers to contribute in other ways to archival processes by translating their lived experience of 'synergistic' experiential states into an academic framework of knowledge (see 3.6 – 3.9). I conclude that repositioning dancers as researchers of their own creative experience through building on the theoretical framework that I have formed could enable a new critical perspective of the dance-making process to emerge.

### Findings from the practical research

6. I observed in the creative processes for the solos that I was directed by each choreographer to become a body—in—motion. This required me to ‘unfix’ movement in a variety of ways. In each case, the process was a destabilising experience that interrupted my sense of being a continuous and solid corporeal self. This process engendered breaking new creative ground through interrupting my habitual conditioned movement in order to effect change on my moving identity. This site of rupture with the continuum of self-hood was a kind of ‘coerced de-stratification’ and may have been more acutely experienced because of the intensity of working within the solo choreographic form. In each case, I was required to re-organise around a new choreographic schema. This process of breaking new ground mirrors Alain Badiou’s (2005b) notion of gaining subject-hood through an encounter with the event, more specifically as he relates it to opening up new fields within science and the arts (see 2.3). This interface between each of the choreographers and me seemed to be where I experienced the ‘otherness’ of the choreographer, that is, where some new element had to be incorporated into my moving identity. With Jasperse, I experienced this new element through the challenge of revisiting past ways of moving that I had consciously discarded and with Melnick, this was most clearly perceivable in my requirement to suspend conscious analysis of the movement and to ‘allow the body to make connections’. In Roche’s process, this destabilisation occurred through the necessity to extend my perception beyond the borders of my body image to form a shared moving identity with the other dancers.
7. The Deleuzian postmodern philosophical framework of human subjectivity that I have followed indicates that although the ‘self’ is not fixed and solid, ‘forces and

passions' are organised in time and space into a dynamic configuration that settles into an 'individual' (Braidotti, 2000:159). Throughout the corporeal configuration of the individual it seems to be essential to project a sense of stability in different ways at different times, from the body image to the habitus and throughout social interactions. Concurrently with my experience of 'de-stratification', I was aware that I projected a continuous self, which at times acted as a defence mechanism against the destabilising effects of the working processes. Interviews with Rebecca Hilton and Catherine Bennett also indicated that they project a continuum of experience against which to measure change concurrently with the process of encountering newness (see 3.12). The 'ecology of the self', which Braidotti (2000) identifies, indicates that the potential for de-stratification is not endless and that it has limitations that arise from the material boundaries of the body (1.16). Therefore, I conclude that in the independent dancer's creative process, a sense of continuity is activated in order to form a background against which difference can be measured. This can also be where resistance to change materialises if, for example, there is a clashing of deeply held beliefs or movement styles. My experience of Jasperse's solo was the clearest example of this resistance, as I experienced an impulse to neutralise and contain the sense of fragmentation of the piece between a continuous calm and 'light' performance presence.

8. Through my practical research, I have concluded that the dancer is capable of being 'many bodies in one body' through incorporating a range of different movement styles. This highlights that independent dancers embody multiplicity as a fundamental part of their career path. The differences between each solo encounter were demonstrated through the movement treatise in which I re-



embodied movement traces from each (see 3.11). The way that each choreographic environment constructed my corporeality as a dancer, was sufficiently distinct for me to register these contrasts as I moved between the various solo excerpts. The differences between each solo were more acutely pronounced in rehearsals before I engaged in the process of staging the pieces, because in performance the three works became part of a wider 'gestalt'.

9. I have observed that dancers are called upon to adopt a series of strategies through which they bring the work to the audience in performance. This is outlined in detail in Roses-Thema's (2007) study and through my written passages on the solo processes with Jasperse, Melnick and Roche. The strategies may not always be consciously enacted by the dancer nor specifically requested by the choreographer, but the act of bringing choreographic work to the stage will require the dancer to find continuities in order to deliver the work. In different pieces, different performance strategies may be required, as was evident in the performance of the three solos in the Dublin Dance Festival. In Jasperse's solo, I had to find a pathway through the many disconnected states, to create a through-line in the work. In both Melnick's and Roche's work I employed a quality of attentiveness and listening. In the former, I listened for internal stimuli and in the latter I listened for external cues. Although the dancer is working from a score of internalised instructions that have been given by the choreographer at this stage in the choreographic process she/he must fully possess the work in order to bring it into the performance arena. The dancer's strategising process is an important element in bringing out the identity of a choreographic work.
10. This research has found that as much as the dancing process destabilises, it also forms the dancer's own signature moving identity. Although dancers are often

required to integrate newness, they may also be chosen by choreographers for their unique moving identity and its impact on the outcome of the work (see Boris Charmatz, 2.9). As Sally Gardner (2007) outlined, modern dance adopted an 'artisanal' approach which is person-specific and built on human-sized interaction rather than the large institutional structures of classical ballet (see 2.6). Artisanal approaches acknowledge the craft of the dancer by locating the outcome of the dance more directly in the dancer's 'instantiated' embodiment. Independent contemporary dance has inherited this approach to a degree while also being influenced by the depersonalisation of dancers through institutionalised dance training. I conclude that the dancer is a kind of journeywoman/journeyman and that independent dance lends itself to the creation of distinct dancing signatures for individual dancers. This viewpoint is becoming apparent in professional circles but could be strengthened by building a knowledge base about the specific creative skills of the independent dancer's career path.

11. I have described the many layers of instruction and strategising that the dancer engages in as a 'corporeal map' that, like a score, forms the choreography. This is the plan that the dancer adheres to in performance and it is located in body sensation and internalised choreographic instructions. This plan is built through trial and error in rehearsals, throughout the process of anchoring ideas into the body's tissue. As this map flows both internally through the dancer's corporeality and moves externally into space to connect with the specific performance environment, it becomes a matrix. Once this matrix reaches a state of stability in performance it becomes a temporary ground on which the dancer can settle into a specific performance identity. In Butcher's work, it was clear that the choreography had its own rules of operation, which were not explicit, yet formed the movement

signature of the work (see 2.13). Therefore, the dancer has moments of stability through which she/he can organise around a particular performance identity only to be destabilised again within a new creative process.

#### Suggestions for further research/ towards methodologies for dancers in their practice

12. Hilton, Bennett and Ní Néill, dancers whom I interviewed for this work, spoke about the impact of choreography on their moving identities as 'imprints', 'markings', 'scarring', or as having had 'plastic surgery'. Despite the dramatic nature of these descriptions, the interviewees did not only regard these experiences as negative. Indeed, there was generally a strong sense of positive learning gathered from working as an independent dancer. However, opening up each time to new ways of moving demands a large degree of versatility and flexibility. Although, superficially, dancers may be able to manage these shifts, on a deeper level these changes may take longer to negotiate. The body image describes deep bodily processes of maintaining perceptual equilibrium and bodily motility. These are essential requirements for maintaining perceptual continuity within everyday life and this research has revealed how this stability is undermined by the process of learning and re-learning different movement engrams as part of the dancer's working process. Narrative processes could be used to 'suture' the fracturing sense of moving between different processes (see 3.5). Methods could be developed to allow the body to catch up with the act of splicing between creative environments. Over the course of my research, in workshops with other dancers, I explored interventions that allowed for the dancer's narrative to emerge. If formed into working methods these could potentially both alleviate many of the

negative impacts of the creative process on dancers and enhance the quality of experience for dancers throughout creation and performance.

13. Francisco Varela's notion of 'mindfulness', as a self-reflective state, which cultivates responsiveness and awareness within any activity undertaken by the subject, could be an important tool for the dancer (see 2.3). Self-reflection seems to be a key factor in establishing a sense of agency and can be applied to the dancing process without creating overt moments of revolt against external structures. This also presents a possibility for dancers to exercise agency while being in a responsive and receiving mode, so that they do not have to take a position that challenges the creative role of the choreographer. Thus, the dancer can achieve Braidotti's (2002:70) notion of 'becoming-minoritarian' through finding empowerment and agency from within the 'subject position' of dancer. Through encounter with the writing of Badiou, Braidotti, Varela and Deleuze, I define the dancer's road to agency and subsequently, subject-hood, in the following way.

- Consciously breaking through conditioning/ habitual movement patterns
- Attentiveness to the present moment through mindfulness
- Self-reflection through narrative writing and speaking processes
- Self-representation to others (to the choreographer; to an ongoing dialogue with peers and to the wider discourse on dance).

This is a broad outline of possible pursuits for the dancer within her/his practice and does not guarantee that subject-hood will be gained or maintained. However, it could represent a beginning of the development of methods and approaches to creatively empowering the dancer without dissolving the many positive elements of the relationship between choreographer and dancer.

14. I suggest that this research has implications for dance training. Dance movement, learned in abstraction through industrial methods without imparting a sense of relationship to human embodiment, can colonise the body. It can wipe the body's expressivity clean in order to receive new movement imprints. There is a contrast evident between training dancers to perform any type of movement in order to be a blank canvas and the specificity of passing on embodied practices from practitioner to practitioner (see 2.6). Gardner's (2007) exposé of the artisanal approach within modern dance and its elision from dance studies indicates that this is a rich area that needs further exploration. Based on the developments within independent dance, it may be less useful to train dancers to be a neutral palette in order to embody any or all styles, than to enable the dancer to begin to develop a signature moving identity. Working with Melnick was a type of apprenticeship, an exchange of information over time, which impacted deeply on my moving identity. Rudner's approach to training, which focused on maintaining a moving body while building technical awareness, does not solidify the dancer's body into one particular style (see 2.3). This method seems to promote a sense of individuality, allowing trainee dancers to build dance technique around their individual and unique bodily structures. This also places dancers at the centre of the learning process to enable them to exercise agency, make choices and build self-reflexivity rather than being a passive surface to be inscribed upon. These approaches point towards possible future developments in dance training.
15. Through the breakdown of distinct cultures, which have become merged and hybridised through globalisation, the composition of each human subject's story and on a deeper level, 'nervous system', is understood to be individual (see 1.9). The dancer traverses a complex territory of changing creative environments and

deeply connects to 'otherness', as represented by the choreography, through incorporating practices. Dancers manage a high level of complexity and multiplicity by engaging in a practice that is based on breaking new ground and opening new experiential terrains. This practice seems to be intensifying through the adoption of neuro-scientific methods to explore the dancer's embodied knowledge. Different epochs have constructed the dancer differently and new media and the information age will no doubt continue to impact greatly on how the dancer is embodied. Ultimately, as highly agile subjects in a postmodern world, dancers could be well positioned to contribute to current explorations of consciousness, subjectivity and human embodiment. However, this may only be achievable in a meaningful way if they are positioned, or position themselves, as self-representational narrators of their unique embodied experiences.

## ***Appendix A: Movement Treatise Text Hauntings and Tracings***

### ***John Jasperse's floor movement on backdrop***

(Voice)

*Identity is anchored through movement.*

*The dancer (that's me) possesses a moving identity which is both continuous and altering from one choreographic process to the next.*

*In this way she negotiates a relationship between stability and change.*

*The dancer builds a corporeal portfolio of embedded movement in embodied traces.*

*She builds a corporeal portfolio of embedded movement in embodied traces.*

*I am building a corporeal portfolio of embedded movement in embodied traces.*

### ***John Jasperse's wall and floor sequence***

(Voice)

*John Jasperse: Solo for Jenny*

*Solo for Jenny: Dance of (an Undisclosed Number of) Veils.*

*Identity is anchored through movement.*

### ***John Jasperse's magic trick***

(Voice)

*John Jasperse.*

*Magic trick created by dancer, Erin Cornell, embodied (or copied from the DVD) by Jenny Roche.*

*Stability and change;*

*I am negotiating a relationship between stability and change.*

*Rosemary Butcher.*

### ***Rosemary Butcher's rehearsal movement***

(Voice)

*Rosemary Butcher—traces of our process together.*

*I felt it about myself,*

*Coming into my body—the potential for decay.*

*A process of memory and recall,*

*Of linking meaning to movement;*

*The body becoming known to itself—becoming known to myself.*

*Jodi Melnick: Business of the Bloom.*

### **Jodi Melnick's marked sequence of movement**

(Voice)

*William Burroughs:<sup>71</sup> "The word is now a virus"...it plagues me in Jodi's work.*

*I trace the movement behind her,*

*Trance-like I mimic and respond.*

*Something of the shape remains in my body,*

*My mind constantly throwing stuff at me—'She' is clinging to identity and form.*

### **Liz Roche's movement**

(Voice)

*The bodies of the choreographers, their physical presences, helped to situate me in each work. They were always around, on-stage and off. They each were points of reference—a container—storage spaces, anchors, markers.*

*Review, Gerard Mayen<sup>72</sup> (he's French)*

*The last sequence, composed by her own sister, Liz Roche, shows the dancer moving almost constantly with her back to the public, inside a square of very strong light on the floor. In a strictly parallel way, on both sides of her, two other dancers perform exactly the same movement, but stay in the dark parts of the stage. This creates the captivating effect of a shadow of the dance that gives a lot to think and dream about; about identity, sameness and their imagined reception.*

*Liz Roche: Shared Material on Dying*

### **Liz Roche's gun-shot sequence (danced with the choreographer)**

(Voice)

*Oh my God, I'm bleeding!*

*I can't remember—Oh Yeh*

(Voice-Over)

*I see the dance works as webs or matrices, projected somewhere in space or perhaps internally in my body mind. Maps formed, holding information, showing alignments and dynamics in a particular and specific way. I contain them and they contain me as we interweave.*

<sup>71</sup> (Burroughs, 1967: 49).

<sup>72</sup> (Mayen, 2008 [online])



*The possession of tissue by ideas, images rhythms and dynamics...they play back on the psyche... they shift the environment. I'm currently at sea. My flesh has felt so radically different over this period of time. Contained, expanded, articulate, heavy; energies have moved through me and anchored themselves.*

***Hybrid sequence of all the choreographies (saying each choreographer's name for each movement)***

*(Voice)*

*I have nothing to offer except to be acted upon. My speaking destroys the world; creates more waste. Yet, how can I be expected to absorb without giving something back to the silence?*

***The treatise finishes with a small sequence of transitional movements, in which I say 'Jenny' for each movement.***

## *Appendix B: Sample of Ethics Consent Form*



### ***ETHICS BOARD***

#### **RESEARCH PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM**

Title and brief description of Research Project:

Meta-morphologies: Multiplicity Embodying Difference; the Irish Contemporary Dancer's Moving Identity

This research project involves the creation of a practical method through which the contemporary dancer can integrate the complexities of multiple embodiments, which I propose are inherent to her artistic practice. This will involve practical research and will encompass explorations with other dancers and choreographers.

#### **Name and status of Investigator:**

JENNIFER ROCHE, Part-time MPhil/PhD student at Roehampton University, Dancer

#### **Consent Statement:**

I agree to take part in this research, and am aware that I am free to withdraw at any point. I understand that the information I provide will be treated with sensitivity by the researcher.

[Delete the categories which do not apply]

- As a **commissioned choreographer** I will be credited as 'choreographer' on all performance material and on the DVDROM. I will be furnished with a separate professional contract, which I will sign in conjunction with this form.
- As a **contributing choreographer** I will be credited as 'contributing choreographer' on the DVDROM and my movement contribution will not be used for another purpose or within another context than this research project without my further consent. I will be paid a fee for my participation and the researcher will pay for all travel and accommodation costs relating to my involvement if relevant.

- As a **core group member** I will be credited as 'research collaborator' on the DVDROM. I will be paid a fee for my participation by the researcher or through my employment with Rex Levitates Dance Company [I retain the right to withdraw in the latter case].
- As a **workshop participant** I will be credited as 'research contributor' on the DVDROM, I will be paid a small fee to cover travel expenses by the researcher. [I will be given the option to make an anonymous contribution].
- As an **interviewee** I will be credited as 'interviewee' on the DVDROM. [I will be given the option to make an anonymous contribution].

All fees will be negotiated before signing this form. The researcher will retain all written and video documentation, which may be used in edited form on the final DVDROM. The DVDROM will be submitted as an appendix to the written thesis and will not be further distributed.

The research documentation will be retained by the researcher for a period of up to five years after the submission of the final thesis, after which time it will be destroyed. If for any reason I withdraw from the research, I will still be credited as outlined above [excluding commissioned choreographers]. The researcher will not forward my personal details to any other party without my consent. Throughout this research I will not be involved in anything beyond my usual professional practice and the researcher will ensure that each of the research venues is of adequate professional standard for dance/choreographic practice to take place.

Name .....

Signature .....

Date .....

Please note: if you have a concern about any aspect of your participation, please raise this with the investigator, or with the Head of School (or equivalent), who is

Name: Dr. Lyndie Brimstone/ Prof. Stephanie Jordan  
 Contact Address and Telephone No: Roehampton University, School of Arts,  
 Roehampton Lane, London SW15 5PJ  
 +44 (0) 208392 3000

## ***Appendix C: Details of Interviews and List of Workshop Participants***

### ***Interviewees***

Bennett, Catherine phone Interview 07/11/08

Connaughton, Philip at Myriad Dance Studios, Wexford 15/10/08

Hilton, Rebecca at Dance House, Melbourne 11/07/08

Rudner, Sara at her apartment, New York 03/01/06

Post-performance discussion with John Jasperse, Jodi Melnick, Liz Roche, Jenny, Roche, Katherine O'Malley & Finola Cronin at Project Arts Centre, Dublin 25/04/08

Workshop Group discussion with Katherine O'Malley, Ríonach Ní Néill, Lenka Vorkurkova & Lisa McLoughlin at Project Cube, Dublin 10/08/05

### ***Workshop Participants***

- Philip Connaughton
- Jane Magan
- Lisa McLoughlin
- Ríonach Ní Néill
- Katherine O'Malley
- Deirdre O'Neill
- Lenka Vorkurkova

## ***Appendix D: Reviews***

The Irish Times “Dublin Dance Festival Roundup”:

Jenny Roche’s embodied knowledge is more fragmented. Years spent dancing works by diverse choreographers have left her body with scraps of dance knowledge and interpretive habits. Solo<sup>3</sup>, three works by Jodi Melnick, John Jasperse and Liz Roche (her sister), allowed her to clearly embody specific roles or what she calls “moving identities”. Jasperse’s Solo for Jenny: Dance of (an undisclosed number of) Veils and Melnick’s Business of the Bloom shone the spotlight on the performer as a conduit of ideas, but Liz Roche’s Shared Material on Dying opened that spotlight both literally and metaphorically. As Jenny Roche danced in the silence centre stage, Liz Roche and Katherine O’Malley mirrored her movements within an umbra of half-light on either side. It was at once elegant, strong and sad, but still offered a meditative sense of hope.

Seaver, 2008, 07/05/08

Mouvement “The Count is in: Irish Dance also has its Israël Galvan; Dublin Dance Festival Changes its Look.”

It is a de-multiplied solo, which she interprets, having called in three other choreographers, including famous New-Yorker John Jasperse. In this way, she intends to question and redistribute the usual structure of power relationships between interpreter and choreographer. The last sequence, composed by her own sister Liz Roche, shows the dancer moving almost constantly with her back to the public, inside a square of very strong light on the floor. In a strictly parallel way, on both sides of her, two other dancers perform exactly the same movement, but stay in the dark parts of the stage. This creates the captivating effect of a shadow of the dance that gives a lot to think and dream about; about identity, sameness and their imaginary reception.

Mayen, Gerard, 2008 [online] (translated by Alex Iseli), 07/05/08

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